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Whither Media Freedom ?

The government of Sri Lanka succeeded in scoring a spectacular own goal in the way it permitted the police to handle the affair involving the news director of TNL, Mrs. Ishini Wickremasinghe Perera. The severe backlash against the government produced among a cross-section of the people over the affair could not have been achieved by even the best efforts on the part of the government's political opponents.

The incident that provoked the police action against Mrs.Perera related to a broadcast of a reported attack by the LTTE on a Special Task Force camp in eastern Sri Lanka. Compared to the almost daily reports that are broadcast or telecast of confrontations between government forces and the LTTE in which sometimes hundreds of soldiers are killed, very often on the basis of press briefings by the Defence Ministry or the military, the report relating to the attack on the STF camp could only be characterised as trivial.

If the publication of reports relating to major incidents such as the Central Bank bombing in which hundreds died, the attackupon and setting ablaze the oil depots at Kollonnawa, the bombing of the train at Dehiwela again leading to scores of deaths, the slaughter of over 1200 soldiers at Mullaitivu and other similar incidents did not cause "acts of violence or religious, racial or communal disharmony or feelings of ill-will or hostility between different communities..", it is difficult even to imagine as to by what sense of logic or reasoning those in authority concluded that TNL report relating to a trivial incident could have caused the offending result.

It is a fact of life in Sri Lanka that politicians of all parties, and even prelates presumed to embody compassion and tolerance, go about the country making speeches at public meetings which in fact cause feelings of ill-will or hostility between communities, or religious, racial or communal disharmony. One is yet to see a prosecution against such persons.

What is worse in this case is the invoking of the provisions of the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act, which has been described by the International Commission of Jurists as "an ugly blot on the statute book of the country", to deal with allegedly offending journalists. It is not surprising, therefore, that the action of the government in this instance has provoked almost universal opposition from the human rights organisations and journalists.

The crocodile tears shed about media freedom by UNP politicians who had been in power before 1994 for 17 long years must be treated with the contempt they deserve. It was during these years that political violence became institutionalised as part of the body politic in which the media and journalists by and large were com pelled and became mere tools in the hands of those in power. The very few who dared to defy were summarily and physically dealt with. Some of the stalwarts of the previous regime who remained silent, condoned or colluded in the forcible abduction and murder of journalist Richard Zoysa are now masquerading as reconstructed paragons of media freedom and democracy. They even force themselves onto picket-lines of protesting journalists. If journalists have friends like these men, they may not need enemies.

Today the question of media freedom has been brought to the forefront by the arrest of the TNL director and charging her under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Besides, the uncontradicted incident in which men said to be close to a Deputy Minister assaulted an ITN crew mistaking them for a crew from the TNL has revived fears of a re-emergence of political violence, particularly directed at the media.

It was on the promise of creating a democratic media culture the Peoples Alliance was elected to power by the people. That there is more freedom of expression under the present government than under the previous regime is not in doubt. However it must be admitted that there is an unhealthy trend in government circles to believe that the privately owned media has become its main enemy. It may be that the privately owned media fails in its ethic of objectivity and impartiality in the reporting of news, views and comments reflecting a political agenda of its own which is against that of the government. The government may justifiably feel that it is being unfairly criticised. But that is the price one has to pay in a democracy with freedom of expression as its corner-stone.

PRIEST CONDEMNED WITHOUT TRIAL

"Excommunication - Arbitrary Unjust and Imperious"

Says Fr. Balasuriya

The Vatican announced 5 January that the Rev. Tissa Balasuriya, a member of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, was excommunicated after the Pope refused a final appeal about writings in his 1990 book, "Mary and Human Liberation."

In a strong response, Fr Balasuriya who is widely regarded as Sri Lanka's greatest Catholic crusader for social justice and human rights, said he had been condemned without a trial or even a dialogue. The 72- year old priest who has served the Church for more than 50 years, described the decision of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) as 'arbitrary, unjust and imperious'.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who heads the CDF, the Roman Catholic Church's doctrinal watchdog body, said in a Vatican statement on January 5 that Fr. Balasuriya had incurred the severest form of excommunication because he had distorted Catholic dogma.

The dispute stemmed from Fr.Balasuriya's 1990 book "Mary and Human Liberation." The author respected in Sri Lanka for his grassroot ties and campaign for social justice and said to be an advocate of what has come to be known as "Liberation Theology," challenges fundamental Catholic beliefs like baptism, original sin and immaculate conception.

The theologian had maintained that baptism, the sacrament that marks a Catholic's official entrance into the church, wasn't necessary. He also refused to recognise the infallibility of the Pope, said the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican's guardian of orthodoxy.

In an official notice, the CDF said Balasuriya had questioned the divine nature of Jesus and denied the dogma of original sin, which holds that all people are born with the stain of the sin of the first human beings. The priest also denied that Mary was a virgin and was assumed bodily into heaven, as church teaching holds. Balasuriya "cannot be considered a Catholic theologian," the CDF notice said.

In 1994, the Sri Lankan Catholic Bishops' Conference declared that Balasuriya's book incompatible with church teaching. Since then, Balasuriya had contended that his text had been misinterpreted. Balasuriya was given further opportunity, the to demonstrate his orthodoxy when he was summoned to the Vatican embassy in Sri Lanka. "Father Balasuriya once again refused and appealed to the Holy Father, asking that a letter he had prepared be delivered directly to the Pope," contending that his "Mary and Human Liberation" was indeed orthodox, the CDF said.

It said Balasuriya was informed that the Pope had personally followed the case and had agreed to the excommunication.

"I firmly state that I have never denied, rejected or deviated from any doctrine of the Catholic faith," Balasuriya told a news conference in Colombo on 13 January. "It follows that I have not committed any form of heresy. Therefore, there is no basis in fact or in law to make a declaration that I have incurred excommunication latae setentiae," Balasuriya said.

"Latae setentiae" is the severest form of excommunication in the Roman Catholic Church. It does not require a court of inquiry.

Appearing in a white Catholic priest's robe, the elderly Balasuriya told the news conference that he had signed, of his own free will, a solemn "Profession of Faith" of Pope Paul VI to confirm his faith. Paul VI headed the Church between 1963 and 1978.

But the Vatican ordered him to sign a different profession, which he said deleted a paragraph from Pope Paul VI's document which lay open the chance of non-Christians to be saved in heaven and added what he called a "gender discrimination" that the Church could not ordain women into priesthood. He said he did not sign the new profession, which was specifically drafted by the Vatican for him.

Despite the Vatican's claims that there was intensive dialogue with him over the matter in the past six years, Fr. Balasuriya said he was never given a fair hearing or trial. A 55-page document he wrote to defend his book was returned with one word of comment, "Unsatisfactory," Fr. Balasuriya said.

He said he had appealed against the decision to the Vatican's supreme ecclesiastical court and that there would be an international signature campaign for Pope John Paul II to withdraw the act.

'The judgement of the CDF that I have defected from the Catholic faith is said to lead automatically to my dismissal from the OMI religious congregation in terms of Canon 694. This is a further injustice in this case.

'Some unknown persons decide on my religious life without a trial whatsoever to arrive at this judgement. The Superior General and General Administration of the Oblates, and the Provincial and Council of the Oblates in Sri Lanka, who have known me and my work during the past 51 years, are apparently not able to have a say concerning this.

'If the CDF could treat a very senior religious person like me in this arbitrary and imperious manner, what could the younger generation of religious expect from the Church to which they commit their lives in the 21st century? It is to be feared the lack of vocations to religious life in the Western countries may spread to our countries too,' Fr Balasuriya said in a hard-hitting statement.

'In the circumstances, I have appealed to His Holiness, the Pope to see that there is a formal judicial trial into this case which has been a cause of grave distress to me during the past four years, and in the meantime to suspend the sanctions being imposed on my by the CDF.

'The Pope has strenuously defended such rights against authoritarian regimes of the Left and of the Right. Strangely his name is being invoked for an injustice within the Church, the like of which has not been seen at least in this concluding half century of the 20th century.

'At the age of 72 after 51 years in the Congregation of the Oblates and 44 years a priest I wish to remain a member of the Catholic Church. I will be in ecclesia and spiritual communion with the Church of Jesus, even if legally ex-communicated by ecclesiastical authorities.

'Conscious of my limitations, and relying on the never failing grace of God, and the communion and companionship of kindred persons, I commit the few remaining days also of my life for the Church to be ever more Jesus-like, united, prophetic, just and lovable; to work for the development of Christian theology in relation to global and local justice, our Asian situation in these times; to try to safeguard human dignity, gender justice and due freedom and rights of all, for the honour and better understanding of Mary, the fearless mother of Jesus and our mother, who supportively and courageously co-suffered with her son Jesus,' he said.

Fr Balasuriya was a founder Registrar since 1953 and later Rector of Aquinas University College, Colombo from 1964-1971.

He was Founder Director of the Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo from 1971, Founder member of the Civil Rights Movement of Sri Lanka since 1971, Asian Chaplain of International Movement of Catholic Students 1969-1979, Founding member of Ecumenical

(Continued on next page)

THE BATTLE FOR PARANTHAN

The simultaneous fierce raids by the LTTE on the military bases at Paranthan and Elephant Pass on 9 January has demolished the Sri Lankan military's claims the Tigers are a spent force and its expectation that an end to the war and a return to peace could be brought about in the near future. The fact that the LTTE was able to mobilise and involve over 1000 of its cadres in such raids showed that it still remained a formidable military machine despite its ouster from its stronghold of Jaffna.

The fact that in the course of the battle of Paranthan army gunners were forced to destroy several artillery pieces to prevent them from falling into rebel hands showed to what extent the military itself feared the LTTE's military capability.

"Prabhakaran is far from being a spent force. He can pick the time and place, concentrate his forces and punch through," A Reuters report from Colombo datelined 12 January by Rohan Gunasekera quoted political analyst Dayan Jayatilleka. The same report quoted a military officer as saying that the government's two-pronged strategy of trying to force the rebels back for talks while offering autonomy to woo Tamils away from the Tigers' demand for independence, would not work as long as the LTTE remained militarily powerful, and that the LTTE appeared to be determined not to allow the government not to talk or dictate from of position of strength.

"The LTTE wants to show that one year after the army took Jaffna the northern theatre has not yet been pacified. The government doesn't understand the mentality of guerrillas. For Prabhakaran, this war is a protracted one. With every such attack he gets world-wide attention," said Jayatilleka.

The LTTE claimed that they destroyed nine 122mm and two 130mm guns, some of the army's most powerful guns. But the army said its soldiers destroyed the artillery pieces and ammunition dump themselves to prevent them from falling into rebel hands.

The loss of artillery also means the government will be unable to cut defence spending as much as it had hoped for this year. "Part of Prabhakaran's strategy is to weaken the economy and make the cost of the war unbearable for the government," former army chief Lt. General Dennis Perera told the press.

The government has said it plans to cut defence spending to 44 billion rupees ($772 million) this year since it had bought most of its arms in calendar 1996, when war spending was almost 50 billion rupees ($877 million).

The pre-dawn assault on the Paranthan camp which began around 3 am on 9 January with "waves" of Tiger cadres advancing with a barrage of heavy gunfire directed at the camp. The Tigers had ensured that Paranthan camp's communications link with the Kilinochchi and Elephant Pass camps were severed before they launched their assault on Paranthan. Within a short time, the Tigers had surrounded the camp.

Reports from the battlefield indicate that women cadres of the LTTE played a major role in the attack both at Paranthan and Elephant Pass. "Eelamurasu", a pro-LTTE Tamil weekly published from Paris reporting this fact said that a woman cadre of the LTTE with explosives strapped around her body threw herself onto a battle tank destroying it instantly.

A wounded soldier from the Paranthan camp lying in a Colombo hospital said, "It was at 3.20 am on Thursday that the Tigers attacked. We were on guard duty at the time I was in the fourth bunker with my complement of eight. The Tigers came in waves; there were three lines: the front line consisting mainly of women attacked with grenades; the second fired mortars and third was made up of unarmed persons who broke in through the weakened defence lines and pilfered what they could. Those who managed to infiltrate the camp concealed themselves behind the mango trees which abounded in the camp." He said over 1000 Tigers were involved in the attack. There seemed to be endless waves of them. The majority of the cadre in the LTTE frontlines were women. They were on a suicide mission, he added.

What is known is that the tigers used, with devastating effect in the latest attack, artillery pieces seized in earlier raids, particularly from Mullaithivu last September when the Tigers overran and destroyed the camp killing over 1200 soldiers and withdrawing with a large haul of heavy weapons.

While the army claimed that over 350 Tigers were killed and 700 more were injured in the battle, the LTTE has admitted to the killing of 140 of their cadres including 78 women in the battle, though no figure for the wounded. The LTTE declared two days of mourning for their dead fighters in the Paranthan battle, in which reportedly 20 of its leading cadres also died.

The LTTE, on Sunday 12 January sought to hand over through the International Committee of the Red Cross what they said were the remains of 27 soldiers killed in the Paranthan battle. But the army refused to accept the bodies, saying they were difficult to identify, Jayatunga said.

The LTTE claimed that it had captured three 120mm mortars, three heavy machine guns, rifles, artillery shells, night vision goggles and a large stock of ammunition during its raid on the Paranthan camp.

Though admitting to a loss of over 140 its cadres, including 78 women, the LTTE has claimed unqualified success in their attacks on the military at Paranthan. In a statement dated 11 January issued from its London office, the LTTE has described

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(continued from page 4)

Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) since 1976, and its Asian Co-ordinator 1976-1986, Founding member of the Citizens Committee for national harmony, Sri Lanka since 1977, Founder member and international secretary of the International Forum of Religions for Global Solidarity since 1993 and Visiting Professor of Faith and Justice in St Paul University, Ottawa, Canada 1993/1994.

Fr Balasuriya said that during the past four years of this controversy over his book, Mary and Human Liberation he had appealed to every relevant Church authority in Sri Lanka and Rome for a judicial inquiry into the charges. But he was being condemned without a fair hearing. He said the accuser, the witnesses, judges and executors in this case were the CDF, going completely contrary to even canon law and normal law.

He said the CDF had demanded that to be saved from excommunication he should sign a specially drafted profession of faith which was 'ominously incomplete and potentially misleading' in to quotation Vatican II documents.

He also alleged that the CDF has authoritatively impeded the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka(CBCSL) from arriving at a settlement of this issue by a process of inquiry and/or mediation within Sri Lanka.

Even the Archbishop of Colombo had been open to the proposal that this issue be inquired into by the CBCSL, but the CDF had insisted it was a matter to be handled not by the Sri Lankan Bishops but by the Congregation in Rome, says Fr Balasuriya.

Fr. Balasuriya, has demanded that the Church rescind its action as it was null and void because he never committed heresy. ●

the outcome of the assault on Paranthan and Elephant Pass army camps as a major victory. Photographs which appeared in the LTTE's Tamil daily "Eelanatham" showed large weapon stocks being lined up and demolished in sequence by LTTE forces within the confines of the two army camps. The LTTE later retreated taking as much equipment as they could carry. The statement added that the Sri Lankan defence ministry had Thursday (9 January) morning claimed Sri Lankan forces had themselves destroyed military hardware to stop it falling into LTTE hands but the photos show categorically this was not so. 11 large artillery pieces are clearly depicted in the photos being blasted by LTTE demolition units. The two camps' entire fleet of armoured vehicles was also blown up and a 10km stretch of bunkers, pillboxes and sentry posts were destroyed. It is estimated that many millions of rupees worth of military equipment was wiped away in a short space of time, said the Tigers' statement.

Over 200 Sri Lankan troops were killed in the fighting and the number continues to rise with many hundreds of soldiers seriously injured. The LTTE lost 140 of their own fighters, 78 of them from the highly-revered women's' corps, the LTTE statement added.

Strategically, the LTTE's twin-objective of dispersing troop concentrations and nullifying Sri Lanka's fire-power by setting fire to ammunition dumps and destroying its heavy guns, proved an overwhelming success. The armoury at these two camps had been used systematically by Sri Lanka to pound heavily-populated Tamil residential areas from a distance. The LTTE victories at Paranthan and Elephant Pass gave a strong message to the Sri Lankan government not to persist with its military solution to the Tamil national question, the LTTE statement added.

The military is reported to have engaged in retaliatory bombing raids in response to the LTTE assault. The LTTE in a statement from London said, " Sri Lankan warplanes have bombed Tamil residential areas within 24 hours of Sri Lanka's defeat at Paranthan and Elephant Pass. Several bombing raids were conducted on Kandawalai at 7am Friday (10 January) morning. Another statement from the LTTE on 10 January said that the Sri Lankan airforce indiscriminately bombed Tamil residential areas around Elephant Pass and Paranthan (Kilinochchi) after the LTTE launched its attack against Sri Lankan forces. Soon after the assault, Sri Lankan Kfir jet bombers, Puccara war planes and MI-24 fighter helicopters began indiscriminately pounding surrounding Tamil villages and the deafening sound of bomb-fire had been heard non-stop since it began on 9 January. ●

Use of PTA Against Journalist Condemned

A large number of journalists demonstrated outside the Colombo court where Mrs. Ishini Wickremasinghe Perera, the news director of TNL, a private television station, was brought up on charges for erroneously reporting that Tamil Tigers had overrun a police commando camp in eastern Sri Lanka. What angered the journalist community more was that Mrs.Perera was charged under the provisions of the much maligned Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Within a short time of her appearance in court, the Colombo Magistrate released her on bail and further directed the police to seek advice from the country's Attorney General before proceeding with the case against Mrs.Perera or taking any more journalists into custody. Outside the courthouse, protesters waved posters reading, "Do not suppress the media" and "Hands off the media."

It is to be noted the TNL is owned by Shan Wickremasinghe, brother of the Leader of the Opposition, Mr.Ranil Wickremasinghe and Mrs.Perera is the latter's niece and wife of a Member of Parliament, Mr. Asitha Perera, who supports the government.

A report was broadcast on TNL radio and TV on 26 December which said that the STF camp at Vellaveli in eastern Batticaloa district had been attacked by the LTTE and the security forces had withdrawn from the camp. A few hours after the broadcast, Inspector General of Police W.Rajaguru appeared on Rupavahini to vehemently deny the TNL report.

The authorities who initiated the action against Mrs.Perera have sought to justify their action on the basis that the allegedly offending report would have led to ethnic tension leading to an outbreak of violence.

Local and foreign journalist organisations have condemned and expressed deep concern about the use of the anti-terrorism law in dealing with the press. Local human rights organisations, Members of Parliament some belonging to the ruling party and academics have joined in the condemnation.

Condemning the use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act to intimidate and harass an employee of a privately owned television station over a reporting incident, the Editors Guild of Sri Lanka said that if there was an error in the reporting of the incident as has been claimed, the duty of the authorities was to forthwith issue a correction. We have no doubt that TNL would have carried that statement as it has in fact offered to do no sooner the unfortunate and unnecessary train of events had been launched. Asserting that no fair minded persons would agree that the impugned report would have unleashed communal violence in the country, the Editors Guild condemned the ham handed manner in which the police acted using unacceptable methods such as late night visits to news organisations, expressed and implied threats of detention against the young woman journalist and other intimidatory tactics.

"Central to the issue is the use of the PTA in this case. As we understand it, the PTA is not concerned with the accuracy or otherwise of the impugned report. It is a special law intended to deal with terrorism, and by no flight of fancy would anybody be convinced that any kind of terror was involved in this matter," the statement of the Guild said.

The Convenor of the Free Media Movement, Varuna Karunathilake described the actions as "nothing but stupidity of the first order on the part of the government". "Even if TNL had telecast an incorrect new report, the government I feel has no business to punish the media under the PTA. This is a total violation of the principle of a free press." He totally condemned the use of the PTA against journalists by the government which came to power pledging to support the interest of independent journalists.

The Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontieres accused the police of an unwarranted display of force with intent to intimidate the media" in dealing with the case.

Since the new government under President Kumaratunga came to power, the press in Sri Lanka, which had for years been cowed down under the previous regime, had been enjoying a substantial measure of freedom. However, the relationship between the privately owned printed media and the government became stormy and controversial reportedly because of the anti-government stance adopted by the media and the open hostility it displays to President Kumaratunga in particular.

While the journalists complain of government's attempt to suppress their freedom, some of the leaders of the government would appear to suffer from a feeling of being besieged by "false and irresponsible" reporting by the privately owned newspapers. The editor of the weekly "The Sunday Times" is presently going through a trial on charges of "criminal defamation" of the President for falsely reporting in a "gossip column" that she

Govt Move for Referendum

What was up to now a mere speculation is turning into a near-certainty that the government may in the coming months plunge for a referendum on its constitutional reform package which will include proposals for devolution.

Addressing public rally in mid-December, President Kumaratunga made the assertion that the political package offered by her government would be implemented during 1997 adding that "with the political package we can solve the problem in the north and east and alienate the LTTE from the Tamil people."

The President added that if the United National Party (UNP) refused to support the political package in parliament, "I'll go the people direct and obtain their support to implement the new proposals. We need a two-third majority in Parliament to change the Constitution or implement the devolution proposals. If the Constitution stands in the way of the majority of the people and goes against their aspirations, we are ready to stage a constitutional revolution. Since we know that the majority of the people are for devolution, we will seek their support directly."

The Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, G.L.Peiris, made the government's intention more clear when he said that "1997 will be a year of action, not endless discussion." He added that the all-party Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC), which has been discussing the government's proposals for over a year, has held 63 meetings during 1996 and the PSC had cleared almost seventy percent of the draft. The discussions would be concluded by March this year after which "we would be able to prepare a final report of the Select Committee for submission to parliament. We are determined to carry foreword and there will a finality in the near future," Mr.Peiris said.

According to the Minister, the government's plan is to be part of a new Constitution for the island and proposes the abolition of the executive presidency, electoral reforms and far-reaching executive and legislative powers to the regions with guarantees of fundamental rights.

Mr.Peiris made it clear that if the UNP did not support the government to get the proposals through parliament the holding of referendum was an option open to it. "The government is not helpless or impotent. It has the option to hold a referendum, but it has not made a decision as yet. We want to consummate the process in the Parliament and arrive at a consensus," Mr.Peiris said.

The government has become increasingly sceptical about the prospect of the UNP lending its support to the package to get it through with the required two-thirds majority in parliament. Leading members of the UNP have been making contradictory statements in public as to the line the party would adopt. While personalities like former UNP Finance Minister Ronnie de Mel and former Foreign Minister S.A.S.Hameed would want the party lend its support to the government to get through the package in parliament, there are a number of persons like Susil Moonesinghe who assert that the party should adopt a line in keeping with its policy of being against diluting the unitary character of the State and against the merger of the northern and eastern provinces.

As for its leader, Mr.Ranil Wickremasinghe, he has become more and more ambivalent on the issue unable to reconcile the contending factions in his party. Many have urged and suggested to him that the UNP and the government party should adopt a bipartisan stance on the ethnic issue. But he ducks the suggestion by saying that all political parties, other organisations including the LTTE and individuals have to be brought into the process.

Very often Mr Wickremasinghe is heard to say that people like Kumar Ponnambalam (who has of late been describing himself as an unrepentant supporter of the LTTE) and S.L.Gunasekera (who denies that there is an ethnic problem, refuses to accept that Tamils have any grievances and asserts the problem Sri Lanka is facing is one of terrorism only), and Rev Sobitha Thero (who adopts a similar line to that of S.L.Gunasekera, but also has been instrumental in the recent formation of a "Sinhala Commission" to investigate into the grievances of the Sinhalese for the last 200 years) should also be brought into the process to arrive at a consensus! A political analyst in Colombo said one does not know whether this is sheer naivette on his part, or is his incapacity to rise above party politics to forge a bipartisan approach to resolve a national crisis, or is he opportunistically biding his time hoping that the government which has only a one vote majority in Parliament would collapse under the tide of mounting extremist opposition to the government's peace process so that he and his party can regain power. ●

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went through the back-door of a well known Colombo hotel after midnight and spent about two hours in the private suit a Member of Parliament.

Hundreds of Sri Lankan journalists staged a peaceful demonstration in Colombo on 15 January in protest against restrictions on the media by a security-conscious government.

About 1,000 journalists representing 27 media organisations took part in the protest while two bus-loads of armed police looked on. There were no incidents or arrests.

"It is one of the biggest gatherings of media personnel this country has ever seen," one of the organisers, Saman Wagaarachchi from the Sinhalese-language Lakbima newspaper, said. "We're demonstrating for a free media principle and a free media culture in Sri Lanka. We want to insist that the government creates one."

All-Party Committee for Talks with LTTE Urged

Member of Parliament, Ravi Karunanayake of the Democratic United National(Lalith) Front (DUNLF) has come up with an interesting proposal that a committee comprising representatives be set up to conduct negotiations with the LTTE. He made the proposal first in parliament during a debate.

Mr Karunanayake said that most of the political parties have shown positive response to the proposal made by his party. He told pressmen in Colombo that he has had informal talks with a cross-section of parliamentarians and the general response was 'very positive and encouraging'.

He said that the talks should be direct and unconditional, and his party was externalisation of the ethnic issue. "The only pre-condition for such talks should be fixing a time-frame of two to three months. The government should not insist on the other two pre-conditions that substantial amount of arms should be surrendered and there should be a ceasefire."

Mr.Karunanayake suggested the appointment of a committee comprising members from 11 political parties represented in parliament. He pointed out that all the political parties including the main opposition UNP and the democratic Tamil parties have accepted that the LTTE "is an integral part of the north-east issue."

Adding that the support of the opposition was necessary for such an exercise, Mr.Karunanayake said that the Philippines government could sign a peace pact with the armed group which was waging a war for over two decades because of the support it got from the opposition parties.

AI CALLS FOR IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION INTO DISAPPEARANCES

Amnesty International has expressed serious concern at the increasing number of "disappearances" that have occurred in recent months in army controlled areas of northern Sri Lanka, especially the Jaffna peninsula.

In a statement issued on 9 January, AI states that, since the security forces regained control over the Jaffna peninsula from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in late 1995 - early 1996, there have been continuing reports of arbitrary arrests and torture, including rape, and 'disappearances' in custody. In particular the number of 'disappearances' reported has been of serious concern.

AI has so far submitted more than 200 cases of people who were seen taken into custody but whose detention was subsequently denied by the security forces to President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. It has urged that an independent and impartial investigation be instituted to establish their fate or whereabouts. Local human rights organisations and Tamil members of parliament have also repeatedly brought cases of 'disappearances' to the attention of the President and other authorities.

In response, the establishment of a unit in the Ministry of Defence with responsibility for the investigation of 'disappearances' was announced on 13 December. In addition, the Human Rights Task Force (HRTF), an official body set up to safeguard the welfare of detainees, has been given permission in principle to establish an office in the Jaffna peninsula. Officers of the HRTF visited Jaffna in mid November. They were reportedly provided with a list of more than 500 names of people who have 'disappeared' in the custody of the security forces in the Jaffna peninsula, which they are checking against a list of detainees provided by the security forces.

Since the government came to power in August 1994, AI has urged that crucial steps should be taken to prevent 'disappearances' from happening, especially after such violations started to be reported again following the resumption of the armed conflict between the LTTE and the security forces in April 1995. Between April 1995 and March 1996, Amnesty International recorded 62 'disappearances', mostly from the east and from the capital, Colombo.

Among the measures recommended by AI for the prevention of 'disappearances' were amendments to the Prevention of Terrorism Act and Emergency Regulations, which allow for people to be held in the custody of the security forces for long periods of time, and for the perpetrators of these grave human rights violations to be brought to justice. To date, no substantial changes have been made to these legal provisions. In addition, impunity remains a major concern. There remains a pattern of proliferation and duplication of investigative units and commissions, rather than concerted action on the findings of those already in existence.

AI has expressed its deep concern in regard to the case of Thamban Paskaran, male aged 26, from Kaithady North, Jaffna district, who has not been seen since 10 December 1996, when he was asked to report to the Kaithady army camp. He did so but failed to return home. When his wife went to make inquiries the next day, she was told that he had escaped from custody around 9.30pm on 10 December. However, he did not return home nor did the army come to look for him.

AI states that fears for Thamban Paskaran's safety are heightened by reports over recent months of the killing of several people who had 'disappeared' in army custody in Jaffna district, including in Kaithady army camp. AI has urged the Sri Lankan government to (a) establish an independent and impartial investigation into his 'disappearance' and all other cases reported to the President, the findings of which should be made public, and (b) bring all those responsible for these violations to justice. AI also urges the government to take all necessary measures to bring a halt to the enduring practice of 'disappearances' in Sri Lanka.

Commission to Probe Sinhala Grievances

A Commission of Inquiry to identify the grievances faced by the Sinhala people of Sri Lanka for over 200 years and recommend remedial measures was appointed on 18 December by the National Joint Committee of Sri Lanka at a gathering at the ACBC Hall attended by the Maha Nayake Theras of the Siyam, Amarapura and Ramyana Nikayas, and a large number of Buddhist priests and laymen.

The National Joint Committee (NJC) composed of 36 Sinhala Buddhist organisations including the All Ceylon Buddhist Monks Congress, Young Mens Buddhist Association, Maha Bodhi Society, All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, Sinhala Protection Organisation, World Buddhist Congress, Sinhala Lawyers Association, Buddhist Doctors' Association, Sinhala Bala Mandalaya of London and the Dharmavijaya Foundation.

The members of the Commission, which has been referred to in the Sri Lankan press as the "Sinhala Commission", include former judges, university professors, academics, a former director of the National Archives, and former senior public officials and the Chairman of the eight member Commission is the former Supreme Court Judge, S.W.Walpita.

The Commission which is expected to submit its report with its recommendations to the NJC in September 1997 has been directed to examine all relevant issues including the following:

- The injustices meted out to the Sinhala people from colonial times and under different political parties;
- Injustices to the Sinhala people by political parties based on racist and separatist concepts;
- Injustices in the denying of traditional lands to the Sinhala people under the Waste Lands Act and the Vihara and Devala Acts;
- Injustices to the Sinhala Kandyan people in the post 1815 era;
- Injustices to the Sinhala people by the granting of citizenship to the migrant Tamil population from India;
- Injustices by the various non-governmental organisations with the intention of destroying the integrity and culture of the Sinhala people;
- Injustices from the biased formulation of education policy by officials during colonial times;
- Injustices through the misuse of the media;
- Injustices through the lack of prominence to the Sinhala language;
- Injustices to the Sinhala people in the fields of trade and commerce due to political reasons;
- Injustices through the forced eviction of the Sinhala people from the Northern and Eastern provinces; and
- Injustices to the Sinhala people by the anti-Sinhala foreign policies adopted by the various governments of the post-independent era.

Delivering the keynote speech on the occasion was the Mahanayake of the Amarapura Sangha Sabha, Ven. Madihe Panghasihe Thera, who said that there was presently a grave need in the country for

(Continued on next page)

Shipwreck Tragedy

92 Lanakans Among 280 Feared Dead

Survivors of a tragedy at sea who said they had paid at least five to ten thousand US dollars each to be smuggled into Europe gave chilling accounts on 5 January of a collision at sea in which Greek police feared as many as 280 people may have drowned.

According to a report by the Sri Lankan Ambassador in Rome to the Foreign Ministry in Colombo, 149 of the passengers of the ill-fated vessel were Sri Lankans of whom 92 are feared to have drowned, and 57 of them reached Greece of whom 51 are in custody and 6 have not been found. An examination of the names of the passenger list indicates that all of the 149 Sri Lankan passengers carry Tamil names.

According to the Greek police, the migrants from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka had told them that two vessels packed with people collided about 15 miles east of Malta on Christmas Day, 25 December 96.

Ahmad Shahab, from Pakistan, told reporters that hundreds of migrants were forced from a larger ship to a smaller vessel before the collision and he saw his own brother drowning. "Some were lost at sea, some may have made it to Italy on another ship and some ended up in Greece," Greek Public Order Minister George Romeos told newspapers.

The ministry said 107 immigrants were arrested Monday, 30 December, when the larger vessel docked at the Greek port of Nafplion and had been interrogated by police.

A tearful Shahab told Reuters: "They forced 318 of us at gunpoint to climb down with ropes from the big ship to the smaller one. The small ship could only take about 100 people. People jumped overboard in rough waters." He said the larger ship then collided with the smaller one.

"People were desperately screaming for help. I saw my brother go down. I yelled "please, please, he can't swim'. But people from the other ship just looked at the ones drowning. Our ship was nearly cut in half and sank," Shahab said.

According to the Greek police, Shahab was among only 29 people who were rescued by the larger vessel. "It is difficult not to believe them," Nafplion Police chief Panayotis Kalofolias said. "The testimonies of all 107 immigrants are strikingly similar and the description of the smaller ship fits an 18-metre wooden vessel stolen from Malta on Christmas Eve and still missing according to Interpol."

He said the larger vessel reached Nafplion on December 30 where it disembarked the immigrants. Police arrested 107 and were looking for another 65. Police said the ship then left port and Greek coast guards were now searching for it.

Italian authorities searching the channel between Sicily and Malta say they have found no sign of a collision. But a Maltese armed forces spokesman said it was not unusual for a shipwreck not to be traced if rescuers did not know its exact position.

A Greek police statement said the immigrants from Sri Lanka had told interrogators they paid $8,000 each in Colombo for an air ticket to Cairo and the sea trip to Europe. The Indians and Pakistanis said they had paid $5,000 each. "I worked for five years to find the money. They told us in Colombo they'll find us work in Europe," said Kanapathi Paramsothy, from Sri Lanka.

"It was shortly before dawn, people cried for help, some drowned because they could not swim, others were trapped inside the crashed ship and went down." He said the captain of the smaller ship went aboard the larger vessel before the collision. Most of the immigrants said they started their sea journey in Alexandria, Egypt, and changed ships two or three times on their way to Sicily. "We were for weeks in the ship's hold like trapped animals. They gave us a slice of bread and half cup of water each day. We prayed all the time to stay alive," Amir Maqbool, from India, said.

"We have arrested 107 illegal immigrants who say they were involved in the collision and swear to the Koran that they saw hundreds of their compatriots go down with one of the vessels which sunk," a senior police official told Reuters.

"Those arrested were almost starved to death and terrified," he added. Italian port authorities said they had been searching the Malta-Sicily channel since December 26 for signs of a collision between ships carrying illegal immigrants, but had so far found nothing.

"Malta asked us on December 26 to look into a possible collision between a big ship and a smaller one but nothing has been found, though we are still looking," a spokesman for the Italian navy rescue co-ordination centre said.

According to would-be immigrants' testimonies a cargo ship flying a Honduras flag was in collision with a smaller ship after transferring 320 people to it.

"The immigrants said the smaller ship sank and only about 30 people were rescued," a Greek marine ministry statement said. Police said the cargo ship continued its voyage and ended up in southern Greece. "The immigrants said they had paid $5,000 each to be taken from the port of Alexandria in Egypt to a European country, most probably Italy," a police official said. Police said another 65 immigrants from the cargo ship had escaped arrest in Greece. "Those arrested were taken to a warehouse outside Nafplion and were told to wait for trucks to pick them up. After one day they came out to find some food and they were spotted by villagers who alerted us," the police official said.

He said the freighter Yioham and a smaller ship identified by immigrants as the Panama-flagged Friendship are on an Interpol "black list" of vessels which often transfer illegal immigrants or drugs.

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the coming together of all the Buddhist clergy to speak in one voice for the salivation of the Sinhala Buddhists of Sri Lanka.

"There needs to be an awakening of the Buddhist monks as one for the protection of the Sinhala country and Buddhism. The lack one united body for this end is a great loss to the Buddhist religion and the Sinhala nation.

"And if this time too if we fail to make an effective attempt towards this end, then it may prove the end of the Sinhala nation. Our failure to do this will see the complete destruction of the Sinhala people within a matter of 40-50 years through the terrorism now prevailing in the North," said the Thera.

The Ven. Thera added that a similar previous attempt during the Premiership of the late S.W.R.D.Bandaranaiake failed in its implementation stage due to the untimely death the Prime Minister. "And no leader afterwards showed any interest in its implementation," said the Thera.

The Chief Incumbent of the Nagavihara, Kotte, Ven. Maduluwawe Sobitha Thera said that while the word of a grave injustice to the Tamil people was being spread all over the world, no mention was being made of the traditional homelands being lost to the Sinhala people in the Northern and Southern areas.

"The word that is being spread around the world is that of the Sinhala people being those that enjoy life to the fullest. The world does not believe that a Tamil population of 12% is attacking a Sinhala population of 77%.

"No one speaks of the traditional homelands being lost to the Sinhala people in the North and the East. The Sinhala villages are still being destroyed in these areas," he added. ("The Island", 20.12.96) ●

New Trends in Jaffna & Concern Over Detainees

"The country had been shocked by the tragedies centred around two young girls who were victims of gang rape and murder by soldiers. These two incidents may not have been uncovered had government censorship remained in place and organised protest, specifically in Colombo, had not taken place. If timely attention had been paid to well documented earlier cases of rape and murder, these lives may have been spared. It is argued in this report that if security forces in any armed conflict are allowed in the name of security to commit violations of human rights involving arbitrary detention and torture, then, rape, secret executions and disappearances are bound to follow," The University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) in a preamble to a report issued on 27 December 96 (Information Bulletin No13) of 30 pages titled "An Appraisal of New Trends in Jaffna & Concern Over Detainees".

The report focuses on detainees being held by the security forces in Jaffna, a topic which is largely lacking in detailed documentation. The majority of arrests and detentions remain unacknowledged and more than often are flatly denied. Specifically, numerous cases of arbitrary arrest, beatings and death due to torture continue to be denied by the Army. The interrogation process is brutal and inefficient, with those suffering the worst harm, both physically and mentally, often being those with no LTTE connections who remain honest in their refusal to submit. Cases of disappearance after arrest remain significant.

Contrasting to this is a marked improvement among many members of the security forces in their conduct towards civilians. Despite LTTE provocation and indiscriminate attacks in public places, there have been no reprisals by the Army. Since the suicide bomb explosion in Jaffna on July 4th, where significant casualties in death and injury resulted from firing by the Army, it seems that the security forces have learnt their lesson and now ask civilians to take cover before taking action. Furthermore, certain commanders have been viewed refreshingly in a positive light.

The LTTE continues to attack the security forces in public places, bringing death and destruction to civilians while failing in their campaign to spark reprisals by the Army. In these cases, grenade attacks are the most common, often being thrown at known meeting places of civilians at the busiest of times. Gun battles in crowded areas and LTTE land mines have also killed a number of civilians. The rationale behind such attacks is similar to the thinking behind aerial bombing and shelling by the security forces, but these recent incidents bring out the hollowness of the LTTE's concerns regarding the injustices of government shelling and bombing in international propaganda efforts.

Besides gross violations by the security forces and the LTTE, the situation in Jaffna today remains one of immense uncertainty and difficulty for the people. Common complaints include harassment at check-points, limited access to education, employment and the outside world, and prolonged difficulty in obtaining travel passes to Colombo. Movement of goods into Jaffna continue to be held up by bottlenecks at the port of KKS and the continuance of such barriers has encouraged a large black market in essential items. The promised establishment of a Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) office in Jaffna by the Government, after a long delay, is yet to materialise. In addition, even with the lifting of censorship, it is impossible for journalists to enter Jaffna without prior approval from the Government.

If the Government wishes to claim any sense of "normality" in Jaffna or to differentiate the conduct of the security forces from that of the LTTE, it must hold itself accountable for all cases of rape, murder and disappearances involving the security forces. The Government has failed to allow public access to lists of detainees and incidents of death due to torture remain undocumented. This only works to the detriment of the Government and plays into the hands of the LTTE which wants violations to continue and has proven time and again that it will stop at nothing to provoke such abuses. Though relations between the Army and civilians in Jaffna have seen a more positive development recently, it cannot be denied that violence has been institutionalised at the highest levels of command and such a repressive system will continue to be reinforced if there remains a refusal to investigate and end human rights violations. ●

Human Rights Award

Dr.Radhika Coomaraswamy, the current United Nations Special Raporteur on Violence Against Women, has been awarded the Human Rights Award for 1996 by the Washington-based International Human Rights Law Group.

This prestigious award is made annually to an "individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the cause of human rights internationally."

The award is to be presented at a Human Rights Award dinner which is to be held in Washington, and be attended by more than 400 persons including Members of the US Congress and the diplomatic community.

Previous recipients of the Award have included Nobel Laureates Wole Soyinka and Aung San Suue Kyi, President Patricio Aylwin of Chile, President Alexander Dubcek of Czechoslavakia, President Raul Alfonsin of Argentina and Sadako Ogata, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Dr.Coomaraswamy, who is a Director of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies based in Colombo, also received the 1995 Rule of Law Award by the American Bar Association's International Human Rights Committee, and the 1995 International Law Award of the American Society for International Law. She has been named by Harward Law School this year as its as its Edward Smith Visiting Fellow.

Unexpected Resignation

The recent unexpected resignation of the high profile Chairman of the Public Enterprise Reform Board (PERC), Rajan Asirwatham, has been much commented upon in the Colombo news media. He has been replaced by Dr.P.B. Jayesundera, one of the two deputy secretaries to the Treasury. Concerned circles in Colombo very much regretted Mr.Asirwatham's resignation.

Mr.Asirwatham, a long-standing personal friend of President Kumaratunga, has had a reputation for honesty and gave his services to the government as Chairman of PERC and also as Chairman of Bank of Ceylon without receiving a salary. When the cabinet, without his knowledge, approved payment for his services, he declined to accept it.

Mr.Asirwatham was a member of the government delegation which visited Jaffna and had negotiations with leadership of the Tamil Tigers before they broke down in April 1995 when the fighting between the LTTE and government forces resumed.

PERC was set up in 1995 as a presidential task force to advice the government on privatisation and the restructuring of loss making state sector enterprises. It was converted to a statutory body responsible to parliament in January last year.

Rupesinghe Targeted

Sri Lankan newspapers gave wide coverage to the presence in the island during the last two weeks of December Dr.Kumar Rupasinghe, the Secretary General of International Alert, an organisation devoted to conflict resolution, speculating that he was likely to play facilitating role in promoting talks between the government and the LTTE. Some reports even suggested that Rupasinghe was expected to meet LTTE leaders in the jungles of north-eastern Mullaithivu, where the Tigers are reported to have their main jungle bases.

For his part, Rupasinghe who no doubt is interested in bringing about an end to the conflict in Sri Lanka met with and had talks with President Kumaratunga, Opposition Leader Ranil Wickramasinghe, several Ministers, MPs, journalists and business leaders with a view to creating a climate of consensus in which serious efforts could be made to bring an end to the conflict through negotiations.

However, there is strong lobby in the island against any involvement of "outsiders", however well intentioned they may be. This lobby includes most of the editors of the privately owned print media which has a wide circulation and leading members of the Buddhist clergy, and they set about casting doubts and aspersions against Rupasinghe and his organisation. In fact, the normally anti-government "Sunday Island" provided a large amount of space in its columns on two consecutive Sundays to one of Sri Lanka's archetypal Sinhala-Buddhist extremists, Gamini Iriyagola, to personally malign Rupasinghe and characterise International Alert as a pro-Tiger outfit. Iriyagola has a reputation for his extremist outpourings in regard to questions relating to ethnic relations in Sri Lanka, but on this occasion he descended to a new low with his distortions and fabrications to mislead the readers. That the Sunday Island and its editor made available its columns to Iriyagola to indulge in a disgusting exercise of character assassination of distinguished men of international repute such as Bishop Desmond Tutu, Prof. Theo Van Bovan and Martin Ennals is a clear manifestation of the attitude of this newspaper to the question of war and peace in Sri Lanka.

GMOA Blamed for Shortage of Doctors in War Affected Areas

The government has become dependent on the services of foreign doctors to vital health services in Jaffna and the rest of the war-torn north of the island as a result of the local doctors and medical personnel declining to serve there. The Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) has also failed to help in the matter. Asked to comment, the Deputy Director General of Medical Services, Dr.K.M.Velummylum, admitted that a number of doctors who were previously attached to the Jaffna Teaching Hospital had gone to Colombo before, during, after the capture

of Jaffna by the army, and they have declined to return there as they had already worked for more than four years there before their departure.

Dr.Velummylum who resigned from the GMOA in December over differences of opinion with the organisation accused the GMOA of not taking steps to send members to Jaffna and other affected areas. "The are not interested in sending doctors there. They are busy fighting for their rights in Colombo," Dr.Velummylum said adding that the GMOA has shown no concern for the suffering people in the north and east.

An identified official of the GMOA is reported to have said that members of the GMOA would be willing to work anywhere in the north and east after the situation returned to normal. Saying that his members could not be expected to take a chance, the official is reported to have added, "They simply can't expect us to work in Jaffna when there is a war going on."

However, the official admitted that foreign medical personnel had been deployed in Jaffna, Point Pedro, Madhu, Mannar, Vavuniya, Kilinochchi and other parts of the eastern province. Doctors and other medical workers belonging to the Paris-based Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), and a couple of other medical relief organisations and Cuban doctors are actively working in the north and east, and these organisations have offered to send in more personnel to work in Jaffna and other places.

The GMOA has a membership of approximately 4,000, and asked whether it cannot find even 20 to 25 personnel to work in Jaffna, the official insisted that nothing could be done until the situation returned to normal.

Some critics of the GMOA refuted its claim that many of its members could not work in Jaffna and other parts of the north because of the problem of language by asking, "How do foreigners work there. If French speaking French and Spanish speaking Cuban doctors could work there, how could the GMOA claim that Sinhala speaking doctors could not work there?"

The Case of Judge Tittawella

Confronted by widespread criticism in respect of the recent controversial appointment of Ms.Shrani Bandaranaike to the bench of the Supreme Court, Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister, G.L. Peiris was quick to point out as to what happened to the judiciary under the previous regime.

During a recent debate in Parliament, Mr.Peiris reminded Members that when the 1978 Constitution brought into existence by the previous government under the late President J.R.Jayawardene, all the Judges were given a standing sack. There was no Supreme Court of the country. The Judges found themselves thrown out on the road having been locked out of their own offices. When new appointments were made, they were done at the whim and fancy of the President. Some of the members of the old bench were reappointed to the new bench, but others were left out, the Minister said proceeding to relate the human story of what happened to Judge Noel Tittawella who was one of those left out.

"When I was a junior lecturer in the University of Colombo, I worked with the late Justice Noel Tittawella. Mr.Noel Tittawella and I were both members of a Glossary Committee. The late Justice Noel Tittawella encouraged me to translate some of my work into Sinhala. This was the Judge who was sacked when this incident occurred. The Judge told me, in his own words, that for the first time in his life he was happy that his parents were dead. And the Judge told me that his mother, in particular, would not have believed that he would have lost his position unless he had done something terrible. That is what the Judge told me.

"In those days, Mr.Speaker, the pension that a Judge had was a mere pittance. The late Justice Noel Tittawella asked for permission to practise his profession. That permission was refused. He was in dire financial circumstances and he had to work in a paint factory. He told me with tears in his eyes, "I am now applying paint." Those are the words used by the late Justice Noel Tittawella. Within six months of that conversation, the Judge died of a heart attack, a heartbroken and a deeply wronged man." ●

"A State can win victories not only by the strength of its armaments, but only by the righteousness of its principles."

- Thirukkural

EPDP RAISES THE STAKES

The recent announcement by Douglas Devananda, the Leader of the Eelam Peoples Democratic Party(EPDP), that his party would take the governments of India and Sri Lanka to force them to implement the provisions of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987, though it received wide coverage in the local press, is considered not a serious or even a viable proposition.

Citing Clause 2.14 of the Accord which provided that the "Government of India will underwrite and guarantee the resolution and co-operate in the implementation of these proposals", and Clause 1.16(e) which provided that the "Governments of India and Sri Lanka will co-operate in ensuring the physical security and safety of all communities inhabiting the Northern and Eastern Provinces", Mr.Devananda contended that because both governments had failed in their legal duty to implement the provisions of the Accord.

He argues that if the Accord and the 13th amendment to Constitution giving legislative effect to the Accord had been implemented, most of the outstanding problems would have been solved by now, adding that the non-implementation of the 13th amendment is a total violation of the constitution.

"Ever since the 13th amendment was enacted, the North-East Provincial Council has not been functioning, and it has not been fully implemented," Mr.Devananda said.

Commenting on the issue, Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister Prof.G.L.Peiris said that the island's ethnic conflict had political and military factors which were outside the ambit of judicial orders. While appreciating the concerns of Mr.Devananda, the Minister asked, "How can courts compel a government to ensure the implementation of the Accord this nature when the factors were beyond its control?" "Although the government is not above the law, it is public knowledge that it is not in a position to exercise its political will in certain areas (LTTE-controlled) in the country. Under the circumstances, it would be futile even for courts to direct governments to enforce the Accord where it has no control. My reservation is about the suitability of judicial relief to solve political and military problems," the Minister added.

Mr.Devananda who is seeking to persuade the government of President Kumaratunga to install an Interim Administrative Council for the war-torn Northern and Eastern provinces of the island, has been stressing that the people of these areas and their elected representatives should be allowed to participate directly in the process of administering these areas.

It has been widely reported that the President had offered Mr.Devananda a place in her cabinet, but he has declined although he advocates the creation of a ministry under a cabinet minister for north-eastern affairs including rehabilitation of displaced people, reconstruction, devolution of power and other related issues. If an Interim Council is set up and a ministry with substantial powers is created as proposed by him, then Mr.Devananda will be prepared accept a cabinet portfolio, sources close to him said.

Mr.Devananda's highly publicised recent visit to India has also helped him to raise his profile. The devoutly anti-LTTE Devananda drove home the point repeatedly during his Indian visit that there was no point in having a dialogue with the LTTE because its leader Pirabakaran would no give up his demand for a separate state of Eelam. According to him any talks resulting from third party mediation has to include other mainstream Tamil parties too. He met and had discussions with a number of Indian personalities including Foreign Minister I.K.Gujral, Union Home Minister Indrajit Gupta, Union Labour Minister M.Arunachalam, BJP leader L.K.Advani, Congress leader A.S.Kesari and Mrs.Sonia Gandhi.

Inauspicious Beginning

Tamil Tigers in a statement on 16 January said they had killed or wounded some 800 Sri Lankan soldiers in the first two weeks of 1997, giving the government what it said was an inauspicious start to the new year.

"The Sri Lankan military has lost 799 men during the first two weeks of this year. The military has suffered 357 deaths and has had 442 wounded. It has been a very inauspicious beginning for the military this year," the LTTE's official Voice of Tigers said in a radio broadcast. It added that most of the casualties were from 9 January attack on Paranthan and Elephant Pass, two major army camps situated just south of the Jaffna peninsula. However a Defence Ministry official is reported to have said the LTTE's figures were exaggerated, but admitted the number of casualties have been high for both sides this year. "They too have had a bad year so far. Their casualties are higher than ours," the official, who asked not to be identified, told press agencies.

The Defence Ministry has said that 223 soldiers were killed and 232 wounded in the LTTE's Paranthan attack. It claimed at least 350 LTTE guerrillas were also killed and more than 700 were wounded in the attack.

New Jaffna Library

The proposed new Jaffna Public Library, which is in replacement of the previous one set ablaze amidst an orgy of violence by the security forces in May 1971, will be more than double its size while retaining the same classical architectural style of the old building, according to sources involved in the project.

The Urban Development Authority has estimated that the reconstruction work on the existing building alone would cost about Rs.90 million. There will be two new blocks added at a cost of Rs.195 million while the estimated cost of furniture and fittings is around Rs.20 million.

The government has appointed a committee of experts to advise on the reconstruction to suit the needs and aspirations of the people, according sources in the Committee. Considering the fact that Jaffna being the main city in the North and one of the major urban centres in the country, the Committee has suggested that the new Library should be comprehensively equipped with reference section, special collection section, children's section, research room, lending section, newspaper, periodical and audio-visual sections and facilities for handicapped users of the library. It is also to be provided with a computer system.

Apart form the principal Committee, five sub-committees have been appointed to look into various aspects of the reconstruction of the Library.

The foot-print of the destroyed Library building consisted of a land area of 27,880 square feet, but the proposed new complex will cover a land area of 93144.50 Square feet according to the plans drawn up. Two reports on the Library have been handed over to the Library Committee for their perusal by former Assistant Director of the National Library Service and presently the Librarian at the Islamic Centre, S.M.Kamaldeen, and for Librarian at the Peradeniya University, H.A.I.Gunatileke. It is to be noted that Mr.Gunatileke issued a statement in May 1981 strongly denouncing the burning of the Jaffna Library and characterising it as an act of "cultural incineration".

9301 Tamil Tigers Died Since 1982

9301 cadres belonging the LTTE died since fighting commenced between government forces and the LTTE in 1982. The following is a comprehensive list of all Tamil Tiger cadres who have died from 1982 to 30 November 1996, according to a statement dated 2 November issued by the LTTE:

Of the total who were killed 8222 were males and 1079 were females. According to the statement 33 male Black Tigers, 45 male Black Sea Tigers and 16 female Black Sea Tigers were among those killed. The breakdown of those killed in major military-LTTE confrontations is as follows: 602 were killed in air and sea combat; 233 during Operation Lightening at Manal-Aru(Weli Oya); 459 during Operation Leapfrog in the Jaffna peninsula; 175 at Kokkuthoduvai; 181 during Operation Thunder Strike; 438 during Operation Riveresa; 314 during Operation Unceasing Waves(Oyatha Alaikal) at Mullaitivu; 115 during Operation Sath Jeya 2; and 126 during Operation Sath Jeya 3.

NAVY VESSEL CAPTURED BY LTTE

In a successful Sea Tiger mission, the LTTE captured fully intact a Sri Lankan navy patrol boat, a statement by the LTTE dated 16 January said. It added that the sea-battle took place at 10.40 in the morning of 15 January off the Jaffna coast between Gurunagar and Mandaitivu. LTTE boats dodged their way past navy gun-fire and attacked two Sri Lankan patrol vessels killing all three personnel aboard one of them. The other Sri Lankan craft which came under fire turned around and fled in panic. There had been a number of other Sri Lankan vessels also in the vicinity but rather than coming to the rescue of the attacked boat, they too turned and disappeared at high speed back to their Mandaitivu naval fortification, leaving the Sea Tigers time to board and drive off with the fast patrol boat. The captured vessel is 21 feet long and possesses a 40 horsepower engine. Arms and ammunition were also on board.

Attack on LTTE coastal camp

Sri Lankan air force helicopter gunships attacked and destroyed a coastal Tamil Tiger camp in the north-western Mannar district, killing at least 10 rebels, the Defence Ministry said on 17 January.

The helicopters attacked the camp at Nachchikudah in Mannar, 240 km (150 miles) north of Colombo, on 16 January. The gunships destroyed a communication tower in the camp and also sunk two large rebel speedboats which were trying to flee the base, the Defence Ministry spokesman said adding that, "Between 10 and 15 LTTE cadres are presumed dead."

The LTTE's official Voice of Tigers radio said in a broadcast on 17 January that two air force helicopters fired rockets at their boats, but did not say if any of its cadres had been killed.

The attack came a day after the Tigers rebels, fighting for reportedly captured three navy personnel. The sailors were patrolling in a dinghy off Kalmunai Point in the northern Jaffna peninsula. Navy officials said that they believe the three men were alive when the boat was captured by the Tigers around noon on 15 January.

"We have asked the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) to help in finding out about them and getting them back," said a navy officer, who reportedly asked not to be identified.

NEWS IN BRIEF

❑ Troops, backed by aircraft and artillery, launched "Operation Rivijaya" in the early hours of 31 December in eastern Batticaloa district where the security forces suffered many casualties in recent weeks having been subjected repeated attacks by the LTTE. The army claimed that a Tiger training base in the village of Rukam had been overrun by the military killing at least 19 LTTE cadres on the second day of the operation. However the Tigers in a statement said that 19 civilians had been killed in the army offensive.

❑ The Government Agent for Kilinochchi, S. Thillainadarasa has been critical about the government's food and medicine ban to certain Tamil areas including his own district, Kilinochchi. A petition was handed over by thousands of Tamil demonstrators protesting at the government's inhuman war-tactics, a statement from the LTTE dated 2 January said.
According to the statement, the GA said he understood the people's grievances entirely and revealed that the government had cut medical supplies to his district by a 75% in 1996. He said he personally knew of many deaths that might have been prevented had the government carried out its responsibilities. Since Sri Lanka's latest military operations against the Tamil people began Mr. Thillainadarasa says no efforts have been made by the government to care for the many thousands of Tamils the government knew would be made homeless. The GA round- ed off his speech promising he would ensure the whole world got to know about the unfolding human tragedy.

❑ The LTTE in a statement dated 8 January said that eight Sri Lankan soldiers died and many more were injured after a dawn raid by the LTTE on six military checkpoints in Thanthrimalai in the northern Mannar district. The six military posts, which stretched over a distance of 300 metres, were targeted simultaneously. There were no LTTE casualties and a significant amount of arms and ammunition was captured.

❑ The LTTE in a statement dated 6 January said that in fear of growing LTTE strength in the east, the Sri Lankan army had withdrawn a further three army camps in Amparai in eastern Sri Lanka, moving soldiers to more concentrated sites. Pakkiyella, Nugalantha, and Walaweli camps have all been recently evacuated. The insecurity of Sri Lankan soldiers occupying certain Tamil areas in the east was heightened recently after the LTTE's major assault on the Pulukunavai elite STF base in which many commandos were killed.

❑ A statement by the LTTE dated 10 January said that Sri Lankan forces raided hundreds of Tamil homes in eastern Batticaloa district in a massive round-up operation. This latest co-ordinated siege began in the early hours of 6 January targeting the Tamil villages of Vantharumulai, Kaluvankerni, Mavadivempu, Siththandy, Morakod danchenai and Santhiveli and other nearby areas. By 3 am the Sri Lankan military began waking panic-stricken Tamil residents and herding them in columns to open fields. Shaken victims later reported they were paraded before masked men who ceremoniously hand- picked many innocent Tamils for arrest. Students and teachers were notable among those arbitrarily arrested.

❑ At least eight government soldiers were killed when an army tractor was blown up by a landmine reportedly planted by Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka's north on 12 January, military officials admitted in Colombo. Ten soldiers were wounded in the mine explosion at Kachchai, in the northern Jaffna peninsula, 320 km (200 miles) north of the capital Colombo.

❑ According to a statement dated 13 January by the LTTE, a military vehicle was blown up by an LTTE landmine killing 10 Sri Lankan troops and injuring a further 12. The incident occurred 14 January at 3.35pm in Kachchai (Thenma- radchy district). The LTTE cadres were unharmed. Again in Kachchai (Thenma- radchy) the LTTE attacked a mini-military camp causing the entire contingent to eventually flee. Many Sri Lankan soldiers received serious injuries but it is not yet known whether any later died. The soldiers left behind a significant quantity of ammunition which was now in the possession of the LTTE. There were no LTTE casualties.
At least five Sri Lankan soldiers died and sixteen were badly wounded when the LTTE staged attacks on a chain of military sentry points at Poovarasamkulam (Vavuniya) in the north. The attacks took place at 3am on 2 January and secured a further supply of arms and ammunition for the LTTE. The LTTE lost two fighters. On the same day, the LTTE took on an army unit advancing towards 78th Colony in Pullumalai (Batticaloa) killing two soldiers. One LTTE fighter was killed.

BIPARTISAN APPROACH NEEDED TO END WAR

'MEDIATION IS BASED ON INVITATION AND CONSENT'

__Ashok Kumar Rupesinghe__, Secretary General of the London-based International Alert Organisation, was a highly amused man when I met him in the spacious 'Cyril Gardiner Suite' of the Galle Face Hotel, Colombo. The radical SLFP youth leader of yesteryear could not help relish the, albeit misguided, media speculation in mid-December that he was on his way to the Northern wilds for talks with the Tigers as a 'mediator'.

But at 53 years today, sobriety takes over quickly, and the successor to the legendary human rights activist, Martin Ennals, founding Secretary General of International Alert, worries that the media mis-information may not only hamper his organisation's efforts in conflict resolution, but could arouse fears against mediation by anybody in the Sri Lankan civil war. Only older Sri Lankan political circles will recall Rupesinghe's role as editor of the radical 'Janavegaya' journal and head of the National Youth Services Council during the 1970-77 coalition regime.

In the international political scene he is already a rising figure as one of the founding group of IA and its executive head at a time IA is increasingly playing a facilitative role in settling conflicts around the glob.

With 18 publications on international politics and ethnic conflicts to his credit, this one time lecturer in sociology at Peradeniya and graduate of LSE was already an internationally known scholar before he took up the IA post.

His reputation as a conflict analyst was built on his studies at the famous Peace Research Institute of Oslo (Norway) and his doctoral studies on development and conflict at the City University of London.

By Lakshman Gunasekara

Q: International Alert is claiming success in its mediatory effort in Sierra Leone last month. But judging from the success rate of cease-fires in Sri Lanka's own civil war, is it not too early to claim 'success' within just weeks of a cease-fire agreement?

A: With regard to the current cease-fire in Sierra Leone: It is likely that there may be violations. Actually, such violations are already happening. But the question is the main framework of the agreement. Within that framework, a number of substantive issues have been agree don. For example, the matter of demobilisation of troops, encampment of forces, the need for a human rights commission, the need for power-sharing mechanisms etc.

The essence of the cease-fire arrangement is the provision for checking on the situation and the exchange of information on the cease-fire by the two sides. There is an arrangement for instant communication by the two leaders and for regular consultation on the maintenance of the cease-fire. The two leaders are in constant touch over the telephone. There is a commitment to consult and quickly halt any fresh outbreak of hostilities.

Q: I think you are talking about 'management' of a cease-fire...

Fixed Principles

A: Exactly. Managing the cease-fire is most important. In the past most cases of cease-fires were within an interstate conflict paradigm. There are fixed principles governing a cease-fire, monitors coming in, peace-keeping forces coming in between the warring parties etcetera. But in internal conflicts things are different. Because of the geographical spread of the conflict within a country, there are no fixed and distinctly separate locations of forces which you can monitor as in an interstate war. Thus, the declaration of a cessation of hostilities and a strong commitment by both sides to maintaining the cease-fire is critical. In Sierra Leone the cease-fire was maintained for a year while peace talks were going on.

Q: So, what you say is that rather than look at a cease-fire as some kind of complete 'end to hostilities in a simple fashion, there is a need to anticipate and manage any possible fresh outbreak of hostilities while simultaneously proceeding to negotiate on the different issues that need to be resolved to achieve peace?

A: Yes, that is right. What we need is not a monolithic but a multi-track and multifaceted approach to conflict situations. In the politics of such cease-fires, there could be some armed protagonists on both sides who want to continue with the war and therefore deliberately disrupt the cease-fire. That can happen from the government side (and this happens often) or from the rebel side. Therefore, the political thrust must be to capture or expand the space for non-military peace-building such as building effective communications between the two parties, communications between the two peoples effective for a dialogue and discussion between citizens' groups, developing a 'culture' of negotiations, etcetera.

Q: In the Sierra Leone case. IA acted alongside the ICRC. What were the roles played by the two organisations? Were there others also playing a mediatory role?

A: In Sierra Leone we saw a division of labour based on the specific mandates of the two organisations. There was also a complementarity of the roles of these organisations as well as of the other actors involved in the mediation process. In the Sierra Leone case, the government of the Ivory Coast was the principal mediator with its Foreign Minister, 'Amara Essy', personally playing a key role.

Mr Essy was recently one of the nominees for the UN Secretary General's post. IA was a facilitator for Amara Essy right through the period of negotiations, including the preparations for negotiations. We provided him with advice and technical assistance. The Ivory Coast government, for its part, created the regional political framework bringing many other actors together so that one would not compete against the other. And Mr Essy also brought in the UN and the OAU Secretariat to provide back-up for the negotiating process.

Q: Depending on the situation, a third party role played by a foreign government need not always be so overt. It could also be a covert or discreet or informal role...

Recent Experiences

A: Of course, if you look at some of the recent experiences of ending conflicts, there are many models and combinations. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, Norway played an extremely low key role which was the hallmark of its very success. In Guatemala too the Norwegians played a similar role. Former US President Carter is another example of a mediator who has played both a public role and a low key role depending on the situation.

Q: Would you say that the backing and the prompting by foreign governments which have some kind of leverage over the parties to the conflict, is essential to the peace-making process?

A: The important thing to recognise is that it is the parties which are involved in the conflict who need to end the con-

flict. They must be driven by a need to end the conflict. The role of facilitators or mediators can only be successful if there is the political will by the two parties in conflict to arrive at a political solution. The parties must 'own' the process. The credit for the success must go to the parties in the conflict. Facilitators and mediators can only play a catalytic role in creating a friendly environment in which the two sides can engage in talks. Another reason why a third party may be necessary is that often the parties do not have the infrastructure or the technical prerequisites for a sustained negotiations process.
A third party can provide the technical support, for example, providing information about other experiences of ceasefires and peace talks, negotiating strategies, models of peace accords. A facilitator can help the two parties in conflict to agree on what issues should be tackled first. Facilitators can also help set a loose time frame for the talks. A third party can also be an effective communications channel. This enables the discussion of issues which are very confidential and non-public (that is, they could be dangerous if made public). Such confidential communications will enable the building of trust between the two sides.

Q: Is there a danger that foreign mediation could be perceived as an interference or imposition on internal affairs?
A: There is a lot of nonsense going on about foreign interference. Peace in a country depends on the two warring parties themselves wanting to resolve the conflict. That political intention sets the agenda. It becomes a national need. The ownership of the peace process is then national in character. In the Sri Lankan case, this country has enough competence to manage the process. If the two warring parties feel the need for a third party facilitator, then they will invite such third parties to become involved in helping out. Mediation is based on invitation and consent. Then there is no question of interference or imposition. There are different types of third parties. The most classical type is the third party with leverage. That is the Indian example - where a big power comes into ensure that the agreement is implemented. There can be different scenarios. For example, in addition to foreign facilitators, local or national organisations could play a third party role as well. A foreign government could provide a venue for talks.

Q: In a situation of successive breakdown of cease-fires and the hardened suspicions and mistrust between the two sides because of the breakdown of ceasefires, can result in a lowering of expectations regarding the peace process. Is this a lack of political will? How does one regain confidence in the peace process?
A: Obviously you are referring to the current Sri Lankan situation. One major factor will be the immense war weariness of the people. This is something often seen in situations of long drawn-out conflict - such as the Sri Lankan case. This mood provides a large reservoir of support, even if tacit, for the peace process. Secondly, the enormous cost of war. Leave aside the expenditure on war and the opportunity costs - the example, not being able to invest in education, or economic and social infrastructure. There is the sheer immediate loss of lives, the destruction of existing infrastructure and incalculable trauma and war psychosis among the entire population of the country. This war weariness becomes a strong pressure point for restoring the peace process.

Q: When you mean the 'people', are you referring to the two political constituencies of the two warring parties?

Displaced Population
A: Precisely. On the one side you have a large refugee population, death tolls and a completely traumatised, regularly displaced population. This sends a message to the entire community concerned. On the other side you have the costs of waging war - in addition to the economic loss, you have the body bags coming home. On the one hand the armed protagonists obviously will be commending either for total victory or a relative victory in order to obtain a stronger negotiating position. But what is not often realised is that, whatever the military situation, it is possible at any point to restore confidence in the process. How do you do that?
All that needs to be done is to start with symbolic messages: to do certain things symbolically. In the Sri Lankan case there is the need to build trust between the two sides. Every time the peace process broke down there was a new cycle of violence. Expectations have been dashed to the ground. Naturally there is deep distrust in the South towards the LTTE.

Q: But is there not a deep distrust in the North as well as towards the Sinhala-led government in Colombo?
A: Right, there is an equally deep distrust and collapse of expectations in the North. People in the North would argue that one of the existing peace provisions - either the Official Languages Bill or the 13th Amendment - have been properly implemented. The Tamil people, as a whole, are in despair over the current situation. So how does one restore the trust? The first step by both sides would be to de-escalate the conflict. Both in military terms as well as in psychological terms, the scale of armed actions on both sides should be reduced. There should be more releases of prisoners on both sides. Both sides should take care to avoid targeting civilians in military actions. It is also very important to ensure that human rights are protected; that civilians are safe in war conditions.

Q: But then in war, all over the world, throughout history, civilians are involved - either directly as providers of troops for the warring parties or as supportive constituencies for the warring parties. And inevitably, civilians get killed or otherwise affected.

Humanitarian Steps
A: But it is still important for both sides to remember that it is civilians who must sustain the society which both sides are claiming to protect. Thus, the more you involve civilians in the war, the more you lose the war. The impact on the civilian populations will only perpetuate the hate perceptions and conflict between the communities. Such humanitarian steps can begin even before formal negotiations start. The second point is that food and medical supplies and other essential supplies to vulnerable groups must be left out of the military equation - especially, medical supplies must go to the needy on both sides. And it must be done with goodwill. Although the military tends to regard food as a weapon, I think it is important that food supplies go to affected areas.

Q: But in the Sri Lankan case, the food supplies may have been perceived as a hostile action. The LTTE may have suspected that the supply of food and medicines to the displaced civilian population in the North was a move by the Government to win over the LTTE's own political constituency and thereby undermine the Tigers' political base...

Political Obstruction
A: There will be many such considerations, but the principle must be maintained that humanitarian aid should flow to both sides irrespective of the politics. We were able to achieve this in Sierra Leone before the peace agreement. There was an agreement that food should be distributed to both sides of the conflict and that helped to build the confidence of the people. Another confidence-building measure is to stop the language of war. This must be done by both sides.
The kind of rhetoric and propaganda by both sides in which they demonise each other is typical of any war situation. This must end if there is to be serious negotiations to end the war. Such hostile language creates a culture which does not allow any movement towards dialogue or negotiations. Instead there should be an openness to the other. The news media here can work to communicate the experiences and problems of the different communities on both sides of the conflict. The Sinhala media today rarely indicates the humanitarian crisis faced by the Tamil population. At the same time, the Tamil me-

dia today rarely focus on the predicament of Sinhala refugees and border villages. This must be done if hostile attitudes are to end.

Q: You spoke of 'demonising'. The standard view of the LTTE in the South, with some exceptions (like this newspaper), is that they are 'terrorists' and do not deserve to be treated as equals in a negotiation process. Is this a desirable way to approach negotiations? Is there a political obstruction here in that negotiations cannot proceed far unless both sides deal with each other on an equal basis?

A: Unless there is a conscious effort to perceive each other on an equal basis, it is difficult to go very far in negotiations. After all, the willingness to negotiate is itself the recognition by either side that they cannot continue fighting forever. Under this kind of compulsion to negotiate, neither side can afford to regard the other as inferior in any way. The practical reality is that both sides are coming to the negotiating table, for whatever reason. The Sierra Leone case is a good lesson for us.

On one side was a government, and military junta, which wanted to behave like a government. But the rebels did not recognise that government as legitimate because they felt the political process was invalid. There was a mind set which the government delegations had about the entire negotiations process. This mind set was dangerous in that it regarded the rebel leadership as inferior in terms of legitimacy. This undermined the very equality of status that is required if there are to be successful negotiations between two aides. The Sierra Leone government side employed all kinds of high-flown legal jargon while the rebel leadership had a clearly laid out set of demands over which they were prepared to negotiate. Both sides had to buckle down and treat each other seriously before the milks made any headway.

Q: There are those who argue that after the breaking of the 1994/95 ceasefire, the LTTE is now in a weaker position both militarily as well as in terms of political legitimacy. Does this mean that the Government side can get away with lesser concessions in a peace settlement? That is, as some people might hope, with less power-sharing?

A: One must acknowledge that both sides are involved in this balancing of military power. Therefore in trying to create a power balance, one is trying to restore the balance by militarily or politically hurting the other side while the other may want to gain more control of territory. But once the military imperative takes control, the tendency to want to go the whole way militarily becomes a part of the logic. But this does not make any sense if, despite all the fighting, there is already a recognition that only negotiation can solve the problem.

Military Advantage

Q: If one does not go the whole way militarily but, instead, the fighting stops and talks begin at a point when one side may seem to have the military advantage, would that mean that the side with the upper hand can aim at giving less concessions?

A: I think it is very important to hear one point in mind. If either leadership is unable to provide a substantial and credible negotiating position, then negotiations cannot proceed. If there is even the slightest sign of diluting the existing political offers, this can endanger the whole movement towards talks. It can undermine any trust that is being built up by the making of such offers for a political settlement is required to solve the problem - So a comprehensive political package which meets the 'original' problem must be available for discussion. Neither side, then, can afford to think in terms of military gains or superiority.

Q: What are the prospects for negotiations in the Sri Lankan situation?

A: What is urgently needed is a strategic approach to the situation. It is better not to negotiate if the infrastructure and technical resources are not yet available and the two parties in conflict are not ready to negotiate. A breakdown in such a case, can led to a massive escalation of the conflict. It is better to be really prepared and to do the groundwork before the two sides begin talking.

Otherwise, it could lead to such a collapse of expectations that it becomes very difficult then to restore confidence in the peace process itself. Then the military imperative takes control of the process. Then both sides try either to regain lost territory or lost dignity - you must remember that things like dignity and self-respect are as politically important as territory. We have to be aware of both the tangible aspects.

Q: So you are stressing the need for better preparation prior to initiating talks...

Negotiating Process

A: There must be mapping out. The various actors in the situation must be identified. The other actors who could play a role in resolving the conflict must be identified - foreign governments in the region or outside the region and, any foreign organisations which could help. The points at which these various actors enter the process must also be identified so that they make their contribution in an effective manner. Another dimension is that there should be talks before talks. That is, first, both parties must agree on the parameters of the negotiating process and the modalities. Time spent on that is well worth investing. Quality time must be given by the sides in the conflict.

Q: That is, at leadership level?

A: At leadership level. Both the leaders must give substantial quality time to this process or appoint people of high repute and credibility. Task forces need to be set up on both sides with people of professional expertise who can map out the whole process, identify the profiles of the leaders, get to know their political styles and do other spadework. The problem with the talks initiated by President Jayewardene for example, was that he invited a whole range of people and organisations to give their views in a very generalised manner. This resulted in confusion. A proper place must be given to the various parties depending on their importance and relevance to the process. It is important to see why the previous peace efforts have failed so far.

Bipartisan

Q: Why do you think they have failed?

A: The main cause has been the lack of a bipartisan approach throughout the entire experience of peace initiatives. It has been either negotiations led by President Jayewardene or by Premadasa, or by Chandrika Kumaratunga. The main feature has been that it has been led by one single political party. There must be a bipartisan approach. If we look at the example set by South Africa we can see the value of the two former main political enemies getting together in the interests of the nation as a whole. We can also identify other shortcomings; poor planning and preparations, lack of competent and credible negotiators, and lack of timing.

Q: When you say 'bi-partisan', are you referring to some kind of consensus on this issue in the South?

A: The essence of bipartisan politics is close consultation on all major national issues with an effort to reach the widest possible consensus on such issues. This could mean regular meetings between the two main parties at different levels - for example, sitting in committees to work out specific issues together.

Q: Could it not be a looser framework? For example, in the UK, the Conservative and Labour parties do not necessarily sit together in any special committees, but they yet have a common approach on the Northern Irish struggle for freedom...

A: That's correct. Both parties have come to an agreement that this issue should not become part of British Parliamentary politics. Even if they do not have exactly the same approach, there is an understanding not to make this an issue in party politics. So neither party will make any move to embarrass the party in government.

It is not my business to comment on the politics of local political here. I can sug-

gest some general principles. Both sides must offer solutions which are win-win in nature. Bipartisan politics must be to find win-win solutions, where everybody feels that they have something to gain. This requires creative approaches.

Q: Can the efforts to evolve a political re-structuring package run parallel to efforts to end the fighting

A: It is obvious that these two processes have relationship. The question is: is there a venue for some kind of discussion between the LTTE and the Select Committee to discuss the common ground between the two processes. This may have to be done on a low key. For example, the LTTE is talking about power- sharing at the centre. It is important to see how these ideas feed into the Select Committee process. The UNP has already said that the LTTE should be brought in at some level. I don't see why this cannot happen at some point.

Q: What has IA's role been in Sri Lanka so far?

Dialogue and Reconciliation

A: Our role has been to promote dialogue and reconciliation. We have argued for principled negotiating positions to be adopted by both sides. We have offered our services as facilitators.

Q: But have you actually become involved as mediators in the Sri Lankan conflict?

A: We have not been invited to perform any such role. In accordance with our mandate as an organisation dedicated to conflict resolution, we have been monitoring the Sri Lankan situation in the same way we have been monitoring other conflict situations.

Q: IA has already hosted a group of Sri Lankan parliamentarians in a program to study the Northern Ireland and South African situation. That multi-party grouping, on it return seemed to have had some kind of consensus on what needs to be done in the Sri Lankan context. Does IA want to encourage that kind of consensus politics here?

A: IA does this kind very often. For example, we took a delegation of Burundians to South Africa to learn from that experience. The visit by Sri Lankans to Northern Ireland was conceived as a visit to another 'conflict laboratory' where the parliamentarian could study all aspects of that conflict and get an idea of that experience. The fact that they later came out with a common statement on negotiations is of course encouraging. It points to the success of our program. But it is left to them now as to how they wish to follow this up.

Q: Is there any truth to the speculation in some newspapers, having met President Chandrika Kumaratunga, you were about to go north to meet the LTTE leadership?

International Representatives

A: (Laughs) Not truth at all. This is all speculation. I have no intention of meeting LTTE leaders in Sri Lanka. In the process of our monitoring the Sri Lanka situation, we have been in touch with all the actors. We have maintained contact with the LTTE with their international representatives in London and other western capitals.

In my current visit here, I met the President, the Leader of the Opposition, representatives of various political parties and groups and peace organisations. In all these meetings we discussed the situation and IA indicated its readiness to help out if, and when, we are needed.

Q: Although IA is a foreign-based organisation, you are Sri Lankan, and one who, in the past was intimately involved in nation politics. Do you have any personal political goals in Sri Lanka now?

A: I left national politics in this country in 1975 when I entered the University of Peradeniya as a lecturer in Sociology. That is almost twenty years ago. Since that time I have been engaged in academic work and in international human rights advocacy and conflict resolution studies. One principle of our work in International Alert is that IA officers should not be involved in any national politics. But as a Sri Lankan, I have devoted a fair part of my life both in my studies as well as in my human rights work, to monitor the tragic situation in my country. I am ready to provide any facility or resource International Alert can offer to all the sides in the conflict in order to end it.

(Courtesy of The Sunday Observer, 5.1.97)

LANKAN POLITICS AND PEOPLE UNDER SOVEREIGN RULE -Part II

by Dr.S. Narapalasingam

Vanishing hope

1994 is a watershed in anti-Tamil politics, as the entire nation gave a clear mandate to the new coalition government headed by President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga (former Vice President of the progressive SLMP) to settle the ethnic conflict through negotiations with the Tamil rebels, the LTTE. She understood the problems and the aspirations of the Tamils and was conscious of the desire of all the people for peace, prosperity and an end to the misuse of powers by those in key positions. The ethnic conflict had by then caused considerable loss of lives and pain to many on both sides of the ethnic divide. By this time, authoritarianism and corruption had also grown to the extent of undermining democracy, rule of law and basic human rights.

The high hopes of the people were dashed by the escalation of the war that followed the breakdown of the peace talks with no sign of any abatement in the suffering of the people. On the contrary, the human and economic losses have risen further to alarming levels. Attitudes have hardened as a result of the killings and human rights abuses by both sides. As before, the main opposition party is not cooperating to settle the conflict through extensive devolution of powers. The state of belligerency, facilitated by the powers vested under emergency rule has helped corrupt law enforcement officers to acquire pecuniary benefits. The feeling among the people that all governments pay lip service to their aspirations is being reinforced.

Human Rights Abuses

The numerous instances when human rights have been violated in Sri Lanka are well documented by Amnesty International (AI), Civil Rights Movement (CRM), The University Teachers for Human Rights, Jaffna [UTHR (Jaffna)], and other human rights groups. Political thuggery and violence have not been the prerogative of any one party. Following the second JVP insurgency in the South, (which according to NGOs claimed 60,000 Lankans missing or dead in its wake) over 8000 weapons including many automatics were issued by the previous government both to its own and opposition politicians and party supporters. Majority of the weapons issued still remain in the hands of these people, although the insurgency was crushed brutally by the security forces. Moreover, the inhuman methods used then have neither been abandoned nor those responsible for these brought to justice.

The recent statement issued by CRM notes: "Sri Lanka's recent political history has regrettably proved again and again that persons who enjoy or think they enjoy political patronage often feel they can

break the law with impunity." What is puzzling is that both the parties when in opposition having disapproved of the conduct of the police force as well as its inquiries into political violence, overlook its actions while in office! The notion that the past should be left alone is detrimental to the aim of establishing a civil society. The silence of the Buddhist prelates on human rights violations in the blessed country is another paradox.

The report titled "Sri Lanka: Wavering Commitment to Human Rights" released on 14 August by AI has also pointed out the recent escalation of human rights violations by the security forces. Government security forces have been blamed for the resurgence of arbitrary detention, torture, extra- judicial executions and 'disappearances' of Tamils. Significantly, AI is also concerned about the lethargy of the government in bringing to justice those members of the forces charged with human rights violations during the previous regime. It has also condemned the abuses of human rights by the

LTTE and armed Tamil groups opposed to the LTTE. The New York based Human Rights Watch-Asia has highlighted the fact that in 1995 (a year after the new government assumed office) many of the perpetrators of these abuses remained free and in positions of authority.

AI in its appeal for urgent action released on 16 September concerning "Disappearances" has observed:- "The UTHR (Jaffna) have documented human rights abuses by the security forces and by the LTTE since 1988. Their latest report issued on 29 August commends the security forces for respecting human rights in the first few months after taking control of the area. But, it expresses concern that incidents of torture and disappearances increased in certain parts of the peninsula after the army suffered a major military defeat at Mullaithivu in July 1996. The report also describes several summary executions by the LTTE of people considered by that organization to be 'traitors'." AI has stated that it "has not been able to independently verify the information in the report, but believes it to be reliable." This observation should be noted by those who are yet to appreciate fully the impartial and painstaking work of the UTHR (Jaffna) exposing the most degrading and inhuman actions of the warriors fighting to 'liberate' the people from the clutches of their opponents.

Some horrible human rights abuses in the areas of the Jaffna peninsula and the Vanni under the control of the army have been reported more recently. Unlike some of the previous incidents, such as those cited in the August UTHR (Jaffna) report, the recent ones have been publicised following the lifting of the press censorship on 8 October. The latest UTHR (Jaffna) report was released on 22 October and provides vivid description of human rights abuses and harassment by the security forces, the LTTE and other armed Tamil groups. Not only this bulletin (Number 12) but also the previous ones must be read in full to understand the plight of the Tamils and the intricacies of the current crisis caused by the continuation of the destructive war.

It has been proclaimed that one major aim of the government is to win the hearts and minds of the Tamil people. So far very little has been done to believe that this commitment will ever be put into practice. On the contrary, the policies and actions of the defence establishment with regard to the Tamil civilians aggravate their misery and desperation. Strangely, the political leadership is either oblivious or indifferent to the happenings on the ground. Anyone who understands the strategy of the Tamil militants, knows that demonizing both the rulers and the security personnel is its key element. Atrocious crimes involving rape and murder like that committed by the armed forces against the eighteen year old school girl Krishanthi and her mother, brother and neighbour within the 'liberated' area lend considerable support to this strategy. The foolhardy way the return of the teenage Tamil girl Chitra deported from Denmark and the four Danish journalists, who came to monitor her settlement in Sri Lanka was handled recently by the authorities is another typical bungling that is counter-productive to the Government's stated aim. The recent costly military gains of the government are being nullified by its astounding failure to win the trust and confidence of the agonized people.

Squandered resources

When the British gave independence, the nation inherited an efficient rail transport, network of roads, education system, administrative structure from the centre down to the village level, public service, police force and judiciary. The entire system functioned strictly according to the administrative and financial regulations stipulated by the colonial government. There was no political interference undermining the integrity of the civil administration and the judiciary. Those found violating the laws, rules and regulations were punished squarely. The separation between the legislative, executive and judicial arms of the government was observed. The rule of law prevailed without the slightest blemish, free from political patronage, bribery and corruption.

It is true that the British rulers neglected development in economic sectors other than export crops and related infrastructure, especially in industries and domestic agriculture. However, unemployment, cost of living and transport were not serious problems. Food was available at affordable prices in relation to earnings and malnutrition was rare even amongst the low income groups. People were friendly and even strangers were welcomed in their habitats, regardless of their ethnic, spatial and religious attachments. The peace that prevailed throughout the country was real.

The colonial government left substantial foreign reserves, which were also boosted by the receipts from the "war fund". In the fifties, financing public expenditures, which were largely on recurrent items that benefited households by way of free education from the kindergarten to the university, free health service, subsidies on essential food items and social welfare payments to the needy was not difficult given the strong revenue flows, mainly from export duties on tea and rubber. Initial capital expenditures were on irrigation projects, land settlement schemes, hydro-power projects and a few industries that utilized local raw materials. The priority in the allocation of resources for public spending was in favour of consumption; its consequences were felt later when the revenue position deteriorated with the fall in the export prices of tea and rubber. Governments had generally reacted to economic problems only after these became acute, instead of taking forward actions to avoid the crises.

Under successive governments, the politicised administrative machinery was suitably adjusted to serve the party in power. The incursion of politics into the administration was done openly. Once it was initiated with the appointments of party faithful to top managerial posts in the public sector, the practice spread right down to the lowest level (drivers, messengers, etc.) in the hierarchic structure. The direct and indirect (by way of loss of efficiency, discipline and morale) cost to the national economy was colossal but this was not anyone's concern. Indiscipline and widespread bribery in the public service came with political patronage.

Had there been transparency in government business as in many developed countries, at least the extent of corruption and public funds squandered would have been minimal. Those who are familiar with the working of governments in the U.S.A., U.K. and other democratic countries would know how swiftly any wrongdoing by the president or ministers is exposed. Even in the capitalist countries, there are various regulatory bodies to monitor the quality and prices of the goods and services sold by private businesses and enterprises. The media there too play an important role as the watchdog of the people. Not only the governments but also the media in Sri Lanka had failed to function in the long-term interest of the nation. Even when press freedom was not curtailed, leading newspapers did very little to promote communal harmony and national unity.

The expansion of public corporations

was at the expense of private investment. They only drained the public funds without contributing to sustainable growth of the economy. Governments used the public sector as provider of jobs for the favourites and the party supporters. It was only after the liberalisation of the economy in 1978, the private sector investment increased. But this has not yet laid the foundations for sustainable high growth. Nor has private (domestic and foreign) investment reduced the imbalances in the economy which feed social unrest.

The economic system was transformed to that of corrupt (crony) capitalism with the policy changes introduced in the late 1970s. With the shift to open economic policies, the people were told that the benefits of economic growth would "trickle down" and reach the poor. In reality, all the indications are that this expectation has also been deceptive. Instead of trickling down, the benefits seem to have gushed up, widening the gap between the rich and the poor! It is estimated that since then, the income share of the richest 20% of the population has risen by 10 percentage points to more than 50%, while the income share of the poorest 20% has fallen to 5%. The very fact that the suicide rate in Sri Lanka has risen to such a height to become one of the highest in the world indicates that the socio-economic condition has become intolerable for some citizens.

According to official estimates 13% of the work force are unemployed. The jobless number would be higher, if not for the labour outflows for employment abroad. The majority of Lankans employed abroad are unskilled female workers, working as housemaids in the Middle East. Sri Lanka has gained popularity in this part of the world as a main exporter of housemaids. The compulsion to get recruited by fraudulent means and the circumstances that compel them to leave their children and husbands in their rural homes to work under conditions that would not be socially accepted back in Sri Lanka are indicative of their dire economic necessity. The desire to migrate in search of greener pastures abroad has not abated.

Private transfer receipts from abroad not only helped to sustain many families in Sri Lanka but also contributed nationally to finance imports. In 1994-1995, these inflows financed nearly 13% of the total imports. Recently United Arab Emirates deported the illegal migrant workers from the Indian sub-continent and the Philippines. Well over 5000 Lankans returned home before the original deadline of September 30. The fragility of this source of income and foreign exchange earnings is yet to be taken seriously and definitive actions initiated to offset its eventual decline.

Privatisation of state assets was adopted as a policy on the recommendation of the IMF and World Bank to increase managerial efficiency in the enterprises, previously over staffed and poorly managed by political appointees and also to allow them to compete freely in the open market. There have been allegations that even in the sale of these assets corruption has played its part denying the true transfer values to the State. With the rising demand for funds to finance unforeseen government expenditures in recent years this has turned out to be simply another source for raising cash. The long-term implications to the economy and the public interest are being overlooked again.

Both the rise in foreign borrowing and government expenditure is now attributed mainly to the ongoing war against the LTTE. Defence expenditure in 1996 is expected to be Rs. 48 billion as against the original allocation of Rs. 33 billion. The actual budget deficit too will be higher, estimated now to be 9% of the total income from domestic production. In 1997, the allocation for defence is Rs. 44 billion accounting for 22% of the projected government spending. Budgetary constraints have contributed to much of the rise in the overall price level (official estimate is 15% for 1996) and high interest rates. As long as internal rebellion persists, budgetary pressures will remain and this in turn will hinder economic progress and the well-being of the vast majority of the population.

The developmental achievements presented through macro-economic statistics, which conceal much of the disparities within the society and the socio-economic conditions of the people struggling for survival are meaningless not only for them but also for many others living in constant fear of being killed, pronounced missing, maimed or abducted at any moment and with uncertain future. Had the past governments directed their efforts towards creating equal opportunities for all groups throughout the country to contribute and benefit from sustainable high economic growth, instead of indulging in deceptive politics for quenching their thirst for power, the present crisis would not have arisen.

Sri Lankans would have by now reached, if not surpassed the living standards currently enjoyed by Malaysi- ans and Singaporeans. The nation was not short of talents but it was the short-sighted and irresponsible thinking of the political leaders that failed to harness them for the development of the economy. Its consequences are seen in the utilization of the skills for destruction within and development outside Sri Lanka.

To quote the 1997 Budget speech:- "After all, the use of Government expenditure should be perceived by the public as efficient and productive as these expenditures are financed by resources belonging to the general public. The public should be fully convinced that alternatives foregone in the process of public expenditure are justifiable. There is a general perception that the country does not benefit from its public spending as much as it should in terms of basic policy objectives." The admission that the resources of the people have been squandered through "politically motivated expenditure programmes" and other extravagant spendings and that financial discipline and accountability will be enforced are not sufficient by themselves to ease the burden on the people.

The actions of previous governments had not corresponded with similar commitments announced in their budget speeches. In many instances, priorities of governments were inconsistent with their declared national objectives. Such gaps between declarations and practices had been widespread in the political system and these became the norm. Only time will tell whether the present government is different or not from its immediate predecessors in adhering to declared principles and commitments.

Tamils' economic life

The ruinous effects of the war on the economic life of the Tamils living in the affected areas of the North-East are immeasurable. The attack on their economic life has been from both sides. Many have lost their livelihood and lifetime savings. Their properties have been either destroyed or damaged and belongings looted. Many have also been driven off from economic activity through extortion, which in the rebels parlance is called taxation. Recent reports indicate that traders in the areas under the control of the Army have been coerced by the rebels to raise their prices! In a climate of lawlessness, not only the LTTE but also other Tamil groups are reported to have indulged in some extortion. The need for money to finance the insurgent activities is so great that neither the method used nor the economic position of the people from whom unbearably large sums of money and resources are extorted matters much to the rebels. Some security personnel are also reported to have taken advantage of the desperate situation of the Tamil civilians and the lax discipline within the establishment to extract money. Only people with means, influence and money can escape from paying the ultimate price.

In the North-East region, agriculture including fisheries had been the main economic activity. The loss in agricultural output (including livestock and fishing) as a result of the war has been enormous, depriving about 200,000 families of their livelihood. Prior to the conflict, 40% of the dried chillies, 85% of the red onions and 30% of the grain legumes produced in the country had originated in this region. All districts, except the Jaffna district were surplus rice producing areas. The region

had accounted for 23% and 31% of the total production of paddy in Maha and Yala seasons respectively. Traditionally, it had been the major source of fish and shell fish. The production in 1983 amounted to over 56% of the total catch during the year. Fishing and related activities had sustained around 60,000 families. One third of the cattle population and one half of the goat population of the country were in the region. The catastrophic effect on agriculture, fishing and related activities are due to the restrictions placed on the transportation of essential inputs (fuel, fertilizer, etc.), ban on fishing, high civilian casualties including the bread-winners in many families, large scale displacement of people, low productivity due to poor nutrition and acute shortage of medicines, lack of funds for pursuing economic activities and destruction of the means of production.

Besides the losses in output and attendant income losses to the people of the region, the damages caused to economic infrastructure vital for both production and transportation of goods have been enormous. Restoration of these facilities will be a costly and slow process, the longer the war continues.

Many Tamils would consider migration as the only option to avoid being harassed by the many 'liberators' from within and outside their community, if only this is feasible. The fear of losing their progenies as well as their immediate survival are also additional concerns. The undue restrictions placed on the Tamil people wanting to move to relatively safer parts of the country had left them with no choice other than to take the risk and cross the Palk Straits. The opportunities for the Government to win the hearts and minds of the Tamil people were missed again carelessly.

Concluding remarks

After nearly five decades of independence, the salient features of the nation's political culture have become killings, bombings, arson and intimidation. The growth of Sinhalese and Tamil nationalism has been the most extraordinary development after independence. This has been at the expense of higher and equitable growth in national income, democratic freedom, national unity, tranquillity and safety of all citizens. Emotions, gut reaction, greed for self-serving power or vengeance seemed to have influenced political thinking. Many considered sovereign Sri Lanka to be the beacon for other developing countries that got liberated from the yoke of foreign colonialism to guide the path for achieving peace and success in human development. But the light that gave hope to many in faraway places has been dimmed by the natives with the freedom donated by the colonial government. It has been misused in the same way kids would handle a priceless and delicate gift, which is suitable for mature adults.

Progress in any field depends crucially on avoiding the costly mistakes of the past. Time will not get rid of the cancer in the society. Prompt and effective remedy is necessary to save the nation. There are too many blunders in Lankan politics and no sensible person can fail to recognize the enormity of the cost of inaction or delayed action. Any viable solution to the present conflict cannot ignore the existence of two ethnically distinct regions and the nationalism associated with it that had been actively promoted over the years by the key players in the political arena, It is fruitless to waste time in politicking, while the suffering of the people is mounting daily. For peace and security, all sections of the population must have hope for a better future. It is precisely the lack of this that has led to the near anarchic situation. At the present time, it is peace that is required first for giving some hope to the disillusioned people. ●

The Travails of the 'Corrupt Queen' of Tamil Nadu

T N Gopalan

Jayalalitha returned to her Poes Garden residence on 3 January to a rapturous reception after spending 28 days in the Chennai central prison. The presence of hundreds of men and women swarming all over her premises and lustily cheering her should indeed have warmed her heart on a wintry evening. But still a long and arduous battle lay ahead of Jayalalitha, described by some as the "Corrupt Queen of Tamil Nadu".

She has as many as seven cases slapped against her. Two or three more are also likely to be registered against her in the coming days. Besides the pitiless Karunanidhi regime, described as such by Jayalalitha's camp, evidently seeking to destroy her politically and even mentally, is planning to set up a special court to try her and her associates.

How much time she will have to take any political initiative and try to rehabilitate herself in the eyes of the people remains to be seen.

Surely the wild stories of her riches planted in the media have the people of the entire country in a whirl. She is seen as something of a latter-day Imelda Marcos or Lady Ceaecescu. Some of the reports are possibly exaggerated.

Like when the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) tells journalists in confidential whispers that the total wealth of Jayalalitha, Sasikala and her clan could run to "thousands of crores of rupees" or that they have stashed away huge amounts in tax havens abroad.

The tax haven business has been in circulation for quite some time now, but so far nothing worth while has been unearthed. In fact even as the High Court was delivering its ruling on her bail plea, a DVAC official had a difficult time before the Principal Sessions Judge convincing him that the inquiry into her acquisitions was taking a long time because of the foreign angle. When pointedly asked whether they had any concrete material in their hands to show that she had such foreign accounts, the official hummed and hawed a bit before saying "Yes" very reluctantly. At one stage before she entered the prison she despaired that the investigating agencies of the state and the central governments should plant mischievous stories in the Press on her wealth and that the latter too should swallow them hook, line and sinker without cross-checking and spreading slanderous lies in the process.

She lamented, "I don't know why the Press should seek to crucify me like this when I have demonstrated my willingness to correct my past mistakes..."

That was indeed a strange strain from her who is nothing if not arrogant and headstrong. In fact she had been making desperate efforts to restore her shattered image in the eyes of the public, beating a hasty retreat all along the line, saying she was sorry that she had antagonised the Press, ignored many well-meaning advisers, erected a wall between herself and the people in the name of security and so on. Finally, when nothing seemed to work, she did the unthinkable - severed her ties, at least in public, with her closest friend and aide, Sasikala besides disowning her foster son V N Sudhakaran.

While one can disapprove of Karunanidhi's all too obvious witch-hunt, surely he wants to make the way for his son M K Stalin's ultimate accession smooth and would not like him to be disturbed by the likes of Jayalalitha, not many will shed tears over her current plight.

The DVAC leaks could be wild and motivated, but the official list of jewels and other valuables inventoried at her residence is enough to nail her for life - 26.6 kg of gold and diamond jewellery, nearly 900 kg of silverware, over 10,000 saris, 750 of them pure silk, 44 air-conditioners,

19 motor cars, 350 pairs of chappals apart from the exquisite and expensive fittings.

The Sun TV, owned by DMK's ruling family, repeatedly ran the footage of the opulent interiors of the Poes Garden mansion, to the audible gasp of its viewers. Magazines and newspapers gleefully carried glossy colour pictures of her acquisitions provided by the DVAC.

But what about the immovables? Several bungalows in different parts of the city and the suburbs besides farms and farmhouses in other parts of the state have been identified as belonging either to Jayalalitha herself or the clique which had surrounded her in 1991-96. It was a clear case of a loot of unprecedented dimensions, even given the general standards of the Indian politicians and accounting for inflation since the days of Karunanidhi's first tenure as the Chief Minister when indeed corruption in public life hit new depths.

The DMK chief joked during the election campaign that if the AIADMK was to be returned to power for another term one could find a gaping hole in the map of India five years hence - the Tail Nadu portion would be found missing, he jibed. Coming from him such a statement could even sound ironical. For he too could have done it had he not been vanquished by MGR in 1977. But the sheer brazenness of the Jaya regime's corruption not to speak of its other excesses has made the people lap up as true any kind of speculations on her assets. And more often than not such statements are backed up by damaging evidence.

Like when Kumudam, a popular magazine, published a photograph of an overblown Jaya and her confidante together, both of them bedecked with innumerable dazzling jewels, enough to make one's eyes pop, aghast at the sheer scale of their greed.

And at the lower levels of economic strata, the popular reaction is not confined to one of moral outrage or disgust. The people tend to be more practical. Either they take it out physically on the objects of their hatred, sometimes even lynching them or pay them back in their own coin, viz, simply loot the property of the looters - some ironical fulfilment of Marx's call for expropriating the expropriators!

A half-built mansion of the clan in Sirudhavur, off the famous Mahabalipuram rock temples and supposed to be a pleasure-haunt of Sudhakaran, was overrun by a mob the very night of her arrest - they made away with whatever they could lay their hands on, from bathroom and kitchen fittings to even marble tiles. The looting went on for nearly a week, it is said. The bungalow looked devastated with gaping holes everywhere at the end of it all.

That nobody dared lodge any complaint with the police speaks volume of the morale of the clan. The police which had looked on benignly at the time of the looting did not care to take any follow up action either even after the media reports on the ground that no complaint had been received by them.

And there were similar instances wherein those who had sold their lands to the marauding forces were quietly taking possession of such properties.

When such was the general attitude, little surprise then that her arrest on 7 December did not evoke any major protest, barring a couple of instances of self-immolation, a hoary Dravidian practice that, and some stoning and torching of public transport. When her party leaders met her in prison, she reportedly expressed her rage over their failure to organise any massive protest. "When someone like Dr Ramdas of the Partali Makkal Kadchi (PMK) is arrested, his followers kick up a big row, setting fire to buses and other public property. But here I am, leader of a much bigger party and a former Chief Minister, behind bars. Still nothing much happens, that's because you don't care," she reportedly berated the likes of Mr V R Nedunchezhian and former Speaker P.Muthaiah. However the front line leadership of the AIADMK did not act, possibly fearing strong reaction from the state government.

Finally she could come out of the prison only because of the court intervention. The seven cases slapped against relate to the violation of the relevant norms in granting permission to the construction of a multi-storeyed hotel in the Kodaikanal Hill resort, import of substandard coal, amassing of wealth disproportionate to her known sources of income, selling land (to the Jaya Publications in which Jayalalitha and Sasikala were partners) by the state-owned Tamil Nadu Small Industries Corporation (TANSI) at much less than market prices, purchase of colour television sets at higher than market prices avowedly for installation in panchayat offices but which found their way to the houses of the AIADMK functionaries, waiving of payments due from an advertising agency to the tune of Rs 2 crore (all these cases pursed by the state government) and the receipt of three hundred thousand US dollars from some unknown person abroad in 1992 but which amount she declared under the Immunity Scheme (by which she avoided paying any income-tax), a case registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

At least five of her former cabinet colleagues and some IAS officials close to her have also been arraigned on various corruption charges.

According to legal experts except for the TANSI land deal and the disproportionate wealth case, in no other case there are good chances of securing her conviction. The government will have gained political advantage though as her image will take a lot of battering as the trials proceed.

Well the trial and conviction are still far away. It is the political moves which matter now. The rival AIADMK has simply failed to take off. The excesses of the DMK regime in handling her cases has already attracted adverse attention from a section of the middle classes and also from the High Court. The latter has objected to piece-meal arrests - arresting her in one case after another, deliberately to delay her release on bail - and demanding her detention when no custodial interrogation was not taking place. And unnecessary restrictions on "political visitors" when she was in prison were seen as petulant gestures. So is the continued detention of Sasikala when her health has taken a severe beating.

The Pudokottai Assembly by-election in February could be some rough indicator of the public mood. A chastened Jaya could be expected to give a tough fight. She is known to be a fighter anyway. ●

Tamil Parties to Go North

Some of the non-LTTE Tamil political parties which have been functioning from Colombo hitherto have decided to go to the north, particularly to Jaffna to begin political activities among the people.

Up-to-now, these parties were reluctant to go to the north because the government was not prepared to agree to their request that their members should be allowed to carry arms. The Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) led by Douglas Devananda, and the Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) led by Dharmalingam Sidhar than have now decided to go to Jaffna and other areas of the north and set up offices there to carry on normal political activities. It is reliably learnt that the Defence Ministry has given clearance for some of the leading members of these party to carry weapons for their personal protection only.

The PLOTE leader told the press his party had already opened an office in Jaffna on 14 January, Thaipongal day. Commenting on the issue of carrying weapons, Mr.Sidharthan said that they were compelled to make the request as a personal security measure. Since the government was not willing to give us security we made the request. We will carry arms only for our own security, he said.

Asked as to whether he and his party men would not face danger from the Tamil Tigers, Mr.Sidharthan said, "We have to take the risk, but we are determined to carry on with our work."

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THE MAHATMA FALLS AND POLITICS TAKES ITS TOLL

Parwez Hafeez

t is a sad commentary on the present state of affairs that when India is preparing to celebrate the 50th year of its Independence, the principal architect of this Independence, is being reviled and ridiculed by politicians like Bal Thackeray. What is more distressing and disturbing is the fact that Mr Thackeray's recent tirade against Gandhi was not an off-the-cuff remark: It was a cleverly calculated move.

We must not forget that Thackeray was not airing his views in a seminar on Gandhi. It was while trying to defend the deputy chief minister Gopinath Munde's extra-marital affair with a dancer that the Shiv Sena supremo articulated these pearls of wisdom. Since he is a person who believes in offence-is-the-best-defence formula. Thackeray deliberately hit out. And since his objective was to divert the attention of the people and the press from the Munde-Barkha liaison and other failures of the Shiv Sena-BJP government in Maharashtra, he chose his target with meticulous care. He trained his guns at the most venerated national icon.

To give the devil his due. Thackeray's game plan has apparently paid off. In the past ten days the focus of nation's press has been shifted from Munde and Barkha to Thackeray and Gandhi. The country was yet to recover from the shock of Thackeray's "painstaking research" about Gandhi's experiments with celibacy and self-restraint being a sham, when he dropped what he thought was another bombshell: Gandhi was not the Father of the Nation. He did not sing this new tune alone.; he belted it out with Pramod Mahajan, the BJP general secretary hoping that the duet would climb the number one position in the top ten charts.

Mr Thackeray further said that he did not admire Gandhi and that his hero was Patel he thought it was pretty obvious and the Shiv Sena chief need not have taken the trouble of announcing his personal preferences. After all how could an apostle of love, compassion, truth, honesty, tolerance, secularism and above all non- violence ever be the hero of the likes of Thackeray. The cartoonist turned politician has never been a great admirer of Gandhi. But recently he must have been further put off by Gandhi and Gandhian ideals because for the first time his formidable empire has been shaken and his unbridled power challenged by a diminutive but strong-willed Gandhian crusader called Anna Hazare.

However, Thackeray should rest assured that Gandhi's greatness will not diminish a bit because of his failure to win the Shiv Sena chief's approval. In any case, it will be sheer naivete to expect Thackeray, Mahajan or any other member of the saffron bandwagon to hero-worship Gandhi. The communalists of both Hindu and the Muslim varieties have always despised Gandhi. Little wonder that he was assassinated by a former member of the Sangh Parivar and it is not surprising that Nathuram Godse is considered a hero by many of them.

Just as it is not surprising that Mohammed Ali Jinnah considered Gandhi the greatest enemy of the Muslims, although the latter implored him. "Don't regard me as the enemy of Islam or of the Muslims of this country." Nevertheless after his party was thoroughly rejected by the Muslims in the 1937 elections, Jinnah embarked on brainwashing them into believing that Gandhi could never be their well wisher because he was solely the leader of the Hindus and the Congress was the party exclusively of the Hindus. In 1938 Jinnah declared that Gandhi was "the one man responsible for turning the Congress into an instrument for the revival of Hinduism and for the establishment of Hindu Raj in India."

Despite this and despite Gandhi's explicit acknowledgement that "every fibre of my being is Hindu" the Hindu chauvinists were convinced that he was unduly favouring the Muslims. So while on the one hand the proponents of Pakistan regarded Gandhi as the main impediment in the path of a separate Muslim homeland, on the other, the Hindu hardliners thought that their dream of a Hindu rashtra would never become a reality as long as Gandhi was alive.

It is a cruel irony that despite being the most ardent champion of Hindu-Muslim unity, Gandhi could not win the trust of either Muslim League or the Hindu Mahasabha. Perhaps the divisive forces knew that if Gandhi succeeded in his mission, they would go out of business. It is therefore, no revelation, that Thackeray and Mahajan refuse to accept Mahatma Gandhi as the Father of the Nation. What these right-wing radical leaders do not seem to realise is that Mahatma Gandhi does not require a certificate from them. What is important is that the vast multitude of common Indians still proudly consider him Bapu.

Pramod Mahajan's recent statement is merely a reiteration of old BJP views about Gandhi. The communal forces have, for obvious reasons, never been happy with the Gandhian philosophy of ahimsa and peaceful coexistence. His pacifism has been held responsible for turning the Hindus into cowards and impotent people. Obviously in their scheme of things, violence and virility are synonymous.

It is this mentality that has been responsible for the increasing vilification of Gandhi in the recent years. Moreover, muted and half-hearted reaction of the people and the intelligentsia has also contributed in the spurt in Gandhi-baiting. People have started indulging in such blatant character assassination of Bapu because they know that they will get away with it. A self-confessed homosexual journalist with Right-wing leanings showed both his deep-rooted contempt for Gandhi and his own lack of taste by making a highly pejorative comment about him and he got away with it. A political upstart like Mayawati called him names and got away with it.

It is not surprising that communalist and casteist leaders have begun to launch frequent and belligerent tirades against Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi for reaping political and electoral dividends. What is most amazing as well as appalling is that even the so-called inheritors of the Gandhian legacy, the Congress leaders, have chosen to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to the ongoing diatribe against Gandhi. That for the present crop of the Congressmen, political interests far outweigh their loyalty to Gandhi was amply proved when displaying rank opportunism and ingratitude. Narasimha Rao forged an electoral alliance with known Gandhi-baiters like Kanshi Ram.

Postscript - years ago, during a speech when Jinnah referred to Gandhi as Mr Gandhi instead of Mahatma Gandhi, he had to face a strong protest from the audience. Despite its persistent demand, when the Muslim League leader refused to yield the audience forced him to abandon his speech in the middle. There was a time when a perfectly respectful prefix was considered not sufficiently respectful for Gandhi. Today in Independent India he has been called a b....d bania and a devil's child. How time has changed.

(Courtesy o "Asian Age")

DESERT RIDES AMIDST WAR AND PEACE

G.Ramesh

The Desert Triangle in the north Indian state of Rajasthan consists of the pink city of Jaipur, the golden city of Jaisalmer and the sun city of Jodhpur. The three cities as well as the lake city of Udaipur are so exotic that they could well have been part of Italo Calvino's famed novel Le Citta Invisibili in which Marco Polo describes his strange wanderings to Kublai Kahan. They have provided the backdrops for some fine Indian films made by director Mani Kaul. The four cities were catapulted to the news headlines when they had a few unusual visitors this winter: the President and the first family of war-weary Sri Lanka.

Well, no-one can grudge anybody's well-earned holidays, especially camel jaunts across the Thar desert and breath-taking sights of cool wintry mist descending on the famed lakes of Pichola and Fateh Sagar as seen from Hotel Shiv Niwas Palace in Udaipur. They are simply superb. Nevertheless, the fact that all this constitutes a politics of style performed with official money cannot be lost sight of. Weren't cameras prying when the US President went to Australia around the time of his election to play golf with superstar Greg Norman in the flush meadows of new South Wales? Of course, successive presidents of the US have always taken such offs and winter holidays.

In the subcontinent, however, year-end holidaying was an alien concept not very long ago. First, it was Rajiv Gandhi who brought home the concept of a working holiday. Along with star-friend Amitabh Bachchan, he discussed the future of India, while gulping down cups of cashewnut payasams at Andamans and Lakshadweep islands and hunting game (with cameras and not rifles, of course) at Ranthambhor wildlife sanctuary. Rajiv Gandhi had ignored the impending disaster of mounting corruption charges against him. And the Indian middle-class masses were stirred into celebrating every New year's Day by having a darshan at Tirupati and going on a consumerist spree. And now, it's Chandrika's turn to combine holiday with politics.

On 24 December, the Indian intelligence agencies leaked the news about a possible meeting between Chandrika and Annamalai Varadaraja Perumal, the former chief minister of the northeastern provincial council, now living at a district cantonment town heavily guarded by the Indian army. The newspapers simply lapped it up, even as they realised that the Sri Lankan foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar was already in Kota to deliver the eighth Krishna Menon memorial lecture. Kadirgamar continued to stay in India, in all probability to arrange the meeting between Chandrika and Perumal. The Sri Lankan establishment made a brusque denial of any such possible meeting. According to it, the trip was a purely personal affair and had no political significance.

Chandrika arrived in Delhi on 25 December, left to Rajasthan to spend three days first in Jodhpur and Jaisalmer, flew back to Delhi to meet the Indian leaders and retreated to Udaipur for two days before returning to Colombo. There was some curiosity about her double-visit to Rajasthan, especially when it is well-known here that Perumal is living in Chittaurgarh fort, which is close to both Udaipur and Jodhpur. However, according to the official line, the ethnic issue figured very briefly in the talks between Chandrika and Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda; yes, Sri Lanka asked for some tariff concessions from India and that was all!

Indian intelligence sources once again quietly leaked the news of her meeting with Perumal and the external affairs department denied it routinely. The terms of talks between the two leaders was the devolution package which the Sri Lankan government wanted to place before the Parliament in March next. After visit, it was let be known that Indian External Affairs Minister Inder Gujral will visit Colombo for three days from 19 January.

It is obvious that the war between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the LTTE has ended in a military standoff. The time for war is clearly over as of now and it is better for one to choose whom one has to negotiate when talking of peace. The Sri Lankan government, it is clear, wants to encourage Perumal to come for talks, Perumal's response to all this changing scenario, however, is not clear. The Sri Lankan government also seems to be encouraging EPDP leader, Douglas Devananda to meet with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M Karunanidhi, whose views matter a lot in Delhi. However, Douglas' efforts have come to nought.

The Indian intelligence set-up is acutely aware of the goings-on. Of late, there have been some curious moves by the ENDLF (which is tacitly backed by Indian intelligence agencies) to "assist" the fight against the Sri Lankan government. The ENDLF was also quick to deny that it was going to aid the LTTE. On the political front too, forces in Tamil nadu and Bangalore are getting active despite the ban on the LTTE. A popular Tamil magazine called Palam is to be launched in Pondicherry soon. The Partali Makkal Kadchi (PMK) which has always been known as pro-Tigers, after some bravado in a meeting held here in November last, is poised to hold a big rally here in support of the LTTE next month. Another solidarity conference held in Bagalore was attended, among others, by George Fernandes and V R Krishna Iyer.

These seem exploratory moves aimed at finding out responses to the possibility of third party mediation in the emerging negotiation scenario. The Sri Lankan President's next visit seems to be aimed at finding the Indian attitude to the next round of talks in which Varadharaja Perumal as well as LTTE might figure. Also, it is certain that the Indian establishment is eager to vet any move in which Western countries will have a decisive say. According to political circles here, the LTTE will not be averse to an Indian mediation effort, provided it came from forces not inimical to it. However, the LTTE has not expressed itself clearly on renewed Indian mediation though some pro-Tiger expatriate Tamils in western countries would seem to supporat such a move. Interestingly, even as Chandrika's plane was nearing Colombo, the news of the "house-arrest" of LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingam made it to the Indian media, though some informed Sri Lankan Tamil commentators like J.B.S.Jayaraj discount the veracity or even the need for the "house-arrest" of Balasingam.

Karunanidhi is reportedly unhappy over the sudden turn of events. He feels he is being sidelined in the ongoing talks with the Sri Lankan government. He may not support the LTTE and other armed groups, but he does not want to see the Lankan Tamils cheated once again. His nephew Murasoli Maran who represents the DMK in the government in Delhi has told Deve Gowda that Gujral must stop over at Madras en route Colombo.

Karunanidhi has other reasons to feel agitated; blood spilt in the Palk Straits. The Lankan navy has intensified its firing assaults on Rameswaram fishermen in the Palk Straits. In December, the naval gunboats fired at least eight times, killing four fishermen and injuring scores. He is now aghast that the killings took place on 21 December, when the Indian government was secretly finalising her desert ride. He is also sore that the Indian navy and Coastguard, instead of warning the Lankan navy, had taken to restraining Indian fishermen from "straying" into international waters. The fishermen, of course,

(Continued on next page)

ON THE STATUS OF TAMIL

BY G RAMESH

This is in response to Professor Sivasegaram's second rejoinder in the issue in Tamil Times dated 15 December. While myself and Professor Sivasegaram may agree on certain empirical points, our perspectives diverge as seen from the following issues:

Firstly, Sivasegaram agrees that diglossia of a language is a sign of its health, but he is certain that diglossia cannot be arrived at by intent. An effort of creative literature, or myth as the ancients knew it, is not only done THROUGH language but also ON and AS language, and hence, several languages consciously work on this fact of diglossia (heteroglossia) to enhance themselves. This happens both in creative space as well as public sphere. The grammarians of Sanskrit and classical Tamil both have been aware of this. Also, they were not speaking about just their respective languages but the general structures of language including narration. This is why the traditions of Paniniyam and Tolkappiyam go on to enunciate myth and literature. Seen the other way, both traditions celebrate the fact of diglossia (or heteroglossia) of language by enunciating literature.

Secondly, the two languages have a difference: Sanskrit constructed itself as the elite variant of the subcontinent's languages, but early classical Tamil took its own poetic/aesthetic route while relating itself to developments on the Sanskrit front.

Thirdly, the "death" of Sanskrit, Sivasegaram should realise, was accompanied by the rise of new languages with specific high variants which started modelling their poetics/esthetics after Sanskrit. Hence, in a way, it can be said that Sanskrit never died out. Tamil, which had a parallel grammatical and aesthetic tradition, by and large, avoided this route.

Fourthly, however, even modern Tamil is not immune to this trend. For instance, the pioneering Va Ve Su Aiyar wrote his treatise on the Kamba Ramayanam on the basis of Aristotle and Natya Sastra. Following him, C S Chellappa, one of the harbingers of the small magazine movement in Tamil, develops his literary understanding using tolls from Western neo-criticism while grasping emotions in a manner similar to the rasa/bhava theory (interiorised experience). This trend is dominant in contemporary literary criticism in Tamil. That Va Ve Su and C S Chellappa did not advocate the use of the Tolkappiyam tradition is evident.

Fifthly, language is not just a medium of communication. It offers a variety of modes of being for humans in creative spaces as well as the public sphere. My point has been that the puzzle of Sanskrit (or for that matter, courtly Arabic) in the earlier periods of the subcontinent needs to be grasped to comprehend the current situation in which English has a dominant and funny role here. While Sanskrit, and later Persian-Arabic, grew by "learning" from the subcontinental languages, English is caught in a rigid "teaching" framework.

Sixthly, Sivasegaram says that English is almost the first language of a sizable section of the subcontinent and uses the familiar offshore argument to drive home his point. Of course, yes. But I am also inclined to consider the presence of English as a problematic to be analysed, not as a natural presence to be taken for granted forever. Hence, this statement needs to be probed further keeping the emphasis on this word ALMOST. The use of this word also throws a dark hint that such persons are fast losing the sensitive balance (of learning/teaching) between English on the one hand and the languages of the subcontinent on the other.

Seventhly, of course, this word ALMOST operates in the creative space as well as in the public sphere. Creative space and public sphere seem to have taken divergent paths at least as far as this issue is concerned. A creative writer like Rushdie, who is an off-shore person but not a progressivist, pushes it all to a logical conclusion and comes up with a startling grasp of contemporary events in the subcontinent. Learning from the subcontinent, his English works have reta- ught the novel-form to the West. In the public sphere, however, the loss of this balance means that English is destined to teach modernity. English would forever be caught as a surface-signifier, unable to learn, let alone learn from, the follies of modernity.

Eighthly, the above conclusion has several implications. The first is that the neo-colonial (or the post-colonial) dream is over: neither the existence of numerous "dialects" of English in the subcontinent nor their creative use by someone like Rushdie implies that English will evolve as a "high variant" which it aspires to be. The next implication is that, inasmuch as English fails to learn fast, the notions generated from the West and its followers here (including those of prog- ress/development), would be hypotheses having no more than performative value.

Ninthly, I am glad that Sivasegaram has no illusions about the standardisation of Tamil. However, it is difficult to comprehend why the "degraded" Madras dialect, promoted by the mass media of Tamil Nadu, should necessarily lead to an argument in favour of standardisation, which can be an issue only on its own merits.

Tenthly, about the latest Tamil phonetic keyboards: Sivasegaram is free to inspect the Kaniyan Visaippalagai, designed by Professor N Govindaswamy of Singapore, and the LEAP software designed for Indian languages by C-DAC, Pune.

Eleventhly, Sivasegaram has recommended a few small magazines. I wish to clarify that ours is not a magazine, but a journal. Its circulation may be small, but I can assure him that we will publish only scholarly articles. The invitation to him to write stands. Incidentally, he has not got its phonetics correct. The journal is not Viththiyasam, but Vidhyasam!

***Ediotor's Note**: This debate, though interesting, is closed in the columns of Tamil Times and it is hoped that it will continue in other journals as both writers have agreed.*

(continued from page 24)

keep complaining that the Lankan naval gunboats open fire at them at will. Karunanidhi has warned of "dire consequences" if such attacks continued; which means Gujral has no option but to speak hard at Colombo.

Karunanidhi has made another quiet move. His DMK filed an application before the M C Jain Commission (probing the Rajiv Gandhi assassination conspiracy) seeking Perumal's deposition. This is to buttress the argument that the Indian government had been aiding one or the other Lankan Tamil militant groups until the late eighties. Earlier attempts to get Perumal to depose before the commission proved futile as the Central government informed the commission that "Perumal is not around". The DMK has now contended that the external affairs ministry's "denial" of any meeting between Perumal and the Sri Lankan President confirms the former's presence in India. With the results that Prumal has to show up before Justice Jain.

SHORT STORY

THE ROUND-UP

By Rajeswary Balasubramaniam

The ferocity of the simmering heat of the April sun was evident even as early as 9 O'clock in the morning. Our bitch Daisy, with its pups, was searching for shade in the banana garden. The white hen which had hatched last week was dutifully searching for food, with its multicoloured chickens. Our cat, tired with searching for fried fish in neighbouring kitchens, was curled up in a corner of the cement verandah.

The cuckoo was cooing from our mango tree. My younger brothers were imitating the cooing sound of the cuckoo, irritating my grandmother in the process. Father was bathing. Mother was making pittu in the kitchen. What a beautiful morning this was.

That day was the turning point in my life.

My elder brother was reading something in the front hall. He is always reading something. Under the shade of the guava tree, my two little sisters were playing the mango-seed game on the squares drawn on the ground. They were ten and eight years of age, worldly innocent.

Grandfather was praying in the prayer room. Words from religious hymns were coming out with feeling from his toothless mouth. The familiar religious Suprabatham, blending with the breeze that came past our jasmine plants from next door Parvathi aunty's house, soothed my ears. I was grinding chillie sambol for the pittu, on the grinding-stone.

Through the gaps in our barbed wire fences, the river Thillai (Thillai Aru) could be seen winding like a snake. The golden rays of the morning sun glittered in the water. Thillai was dry and looked like a canal. The beauty of the sunrays clinging onto the body of that river like a dress, al- ways enthralls me.

The howling of dogs in the distance disrupted my thoughts that were engrossed in the serenity of the morning. The dogs were showing opposition by their ferocious barking. A sickening feeling was beginning to grip my stomach from its very bottom.

In those days, if there was the howling of the fox on the outskirts of the village, it was the belief of the villagers that a death was impending. Today, if there is the barking of the dogs on the outskirts, it means that there is a Round-Up by the military.

Mother came running out, leaving the cooking in the midst. Father, with the unwashed soap on his body, was looking in the direction of the road. Grandfather, who had been so feelingly reciting religious hymns, appeared on the verandah with a distraught face.

The growling of the military tanks could be heard from the distance. Hundreds of soldiers in military vehicles and on foot were surrounding the village with menacing machine guns and emotionless eyes, like messengers of death. With the burning sensation from grinding the chilli sambol, my soul stirred. Helpelessly, everybody in the house anxiously looked at each other.

'Thambi (son), run away somewhere', our mother begged my elder brother. In neighbouring compounds, some youths were running through the fences. The hunt has begun. They are clearing the forest. They are hunting the "terrorists"!

When the Sri Lankan army staged the last Round-Up, they had destroyed all the fences and also cut down all the big trees. Because the Tamil militants would attack them hiding behind them, it seems. Not only that, they also did not want these fences and gates to deter them from moving about freely as they wanted into Tamil homes.

The enemy's gun has dented the swollen pride of the Tamil community, torn asunder by its own divisions of caste and creed and petty bickerings.

While the young were running, the old hiding, mothers wailing, forlorn and helpless, grandmothers screaming and young girls disappearing, the dogs and the fowl were making a hue and cry. The 'Suprabatham' from neighbouring Parvathy Aunty's could be heard, its music missing its beat and interrupted by bursts of gunfire.

The army was closing in. Dust rose up from the lanes unused to large vehicles. Bullets riddled the bodies of those who ran. They fell like trees cut-down by winds of cyclonic velocity and power. Mother earth shook unable to bear the wounded wailing of mothers. The army was advancing all around the village. There was perspiration on our mother's face and rivulets of tears pouring down from her eyes. Father's face was pale and livid. I could visualise Yama (the Demon of Death) and his legendary rope of death in the eyes of my little sisters. My elder brother found himself trapped in our own home. He can't run anywhere. The soldiers have surround- ed the house. My younger brothers both have lowered themselves into our well, fortunately the water level remaining just below their nose, in the hope the soldiers would not be intelligent enough to look down into the well.

My two little sisters hid in a corner, along with the hen, hiding its chicken in its wings.

Our grandmother beat herself on her head and mouth, looking at me. Though I have not become a 'big girl' yet, the men in uniform casting their eyes on me are not going to bother about it. That my elder brother and I would become preys to the advancing military vultures could be fathomed in the unspoken apprehension of my grandmother.

I closed my eyes tightly. I wanted to imagine that all that was happening around me was just imagination, a frightening dream. Will imagination become true? Will dreams turn real? Mother dragged me and pushed me behind the sacks of paddy. Only God could save me, who was incapable of saving himself, I thought.

The soldiers thundered in our lane. Our gateways became the platforms for their big boots. Death and destruction was staged in the name of imposing the authority of State. In the streets, youths caught by the army were being bundled into trucks. Those youths who had been shot were being dragged along, their blood painting our streets red.

Is this the generation heir to the heroic heritage of the Tamilian who had hoisted his flag from Kanyakumari to the Himalayas?

Hidden behind the paddy sacks, I surveyed the world through the window. Oh! Why shouldn't the earth split asunder and swallow us all up? What sin have the Tamils committed to undergo such terrible suffering? Is this the punishment for them for demanding to maintain Tamil as their own language which they have spoken for ages and the land in which they had crawled as children?

Mother was begging with folded hands. The soldiers were beating up my elder brother. My dearest mother was crying, with spasms convulsing her abdomen which had conceived and brought forth my brother into this world. "You look young, the same age as my son. How will your mother feel if you are beaten up in

front of her eyes in the way you and your friends are doing to my son?", my mother would have wanted to ask the soldier who was beating up my brother, but she didn't out of fear.

My father who went to the rescue of my brother was hit on the head. Blood gushed forth. My little sisters screamed. When grandmother tried to intervene, she was stamped upon like a worm by a booted soldier.

The screams of my brother pierced my heart. My brother's body was now the property of the soldiers who had come down our lane. They beat up my elder brother and kicked him. Accusing him of being a terrorist, they pierced his chest and stomach with their bayonets. The cries of my brother, who had taught me to write the alphabet keeping me in his lap, deafened my ears. Nothing came out of his mouth except the words 'Ammah, Ammah' (Mother, Mother). His screaming was gro-wing less and less audible.

Where has Lord Shiva (the head of Hindu patheon of Gods), whose feet our grandfather has been holding onto tightly with his earnest prayers, fled ? To a strange and distant place where some his so-called human creations do not commit such acts of barbarity upon his other creations!

Mother had fainted. She was not able to see the half-dead body of my brother being dragged along the street. Father's face looked horrible with the blood dripping down from his head.

One soldier dragged me out from my hiding place. Grandmother held me tight. There was fire in her eyes. Wouldn't the world explode in flames? What a tight hold hers was, even in this withering age!

Grandfather, who only a little while ago had been holding on tightly to the feet of sacred Shiva, was now holding tightly the dusty booted-feet of the soldier, imploring him, 'Leave my granddaughter alone'.

Tamil womanhood was being bargained for in a frensy of communal hatred.

The army Captain looked at me from head to foot. Did the budding beauty, only fourteen year old, mesmerise his jaundiced eyes? His gaze was going far beyond my body. Such a look it was. I did not cry. My senses have become benumbed. In one such previous Round-Up, many Tamil women became pray to their lustful hunger. Whether the age of us Tamil wom- en is eight or ten or twelve is not a problem. If they thought that they could satisfy their depravity, it was all right. They are animals. Theirs is cannibalistic hunger. They search for Tamil militants; but we are the sacrificial lambs.

One soldier was moving his hand slowly down on my long hair. Grandmother spat at him. Grandfather banked his head on the soldier's feet he had been holding. Father with drying blood on his head and face, brother lying half-dead, senseless mother, wailing grandmother, pityingly imploring grandfather - what can Tamil womanhood do?

Won't you, Lord Shiva, whose feet my grandfather had held onto with his tearful prayers, perform the cosmic dance of destruction? Kannan for Thraupathy in Maha-baratham, Hanuman for Sita in Ramayana, but who is there to help the Sri Lankan Tamil woman in the Sinhala-Tamil war?

Closing my eyes and biting my lips, I prayed. The army Captain stared at me. May be, there was a daughter of his like me. Or a sister? Or, even a niece? God knows what went through his mind. At his signal, the soldier holding me slackened his hold.

Mother Goddess Kali, who destroys the men of evil, why have you run away from Sri Lanka? Come running ...come running... come running back and save us! I thought like a mad woman. In the guise of the Sinhalese Army, the asuras (devils) have started moving to Round-Up our village. Wouldn't Kannan take a rebirth to destroy them? Should the destruction of the Kali yuga descend only on the Sri Lankan Tamils?

That day, in our village and adjoining villages, more than two hundred Tamils were arrested. Countless numbers were attacked in their own houses. While hawks and ravens were flying in the sky, innocent Tamils were being shot down like birds on earth.

Our green land, spread like a green saree, was dotted red with the blood of the Tamils. The wailing of mothers shamed the soft winds.

The river Thillai flows between the sea and our village. When you pass the sandy plateau of the Thillai, there is the belly of the Bay of Bengal, from where ships travel to all parts of the globe. On that sandy plateau constructed by God, dividing river and sea, we had played as children, catching crabs. We had imprinted out little footsteps, touching and running along with the oncoming waves.

That sandy plateau has today become a crematorium. There, our village youths were taken. Would the soldiers have said with scorn, 'The Tamils are good at mathmaatics?' Or, 'Hey! Tamil dog! Dig a hole six feet long and three feet deep!' On that crisp order, our youths dug their own graves. Forty-four of our youngsters, many of them still alive, were buried that day. The half-dead bodies of my elder brother and another forty-three persons were heaped together.

That evening hour, when the sky was painted bloody red, the black smoke rising from the bodies burnt with tyres heaped on them, signaled to the world the cussedness and cruelty of humanity. On that day alone, one hundred and twenty-five Tamil women were made widows in our village. At the edge of the village, past the river, our mothers were crying out for their sons' lives dissolving into black smoke.

My aged father and my grandfather who were arrested returned home in a few days after being tortured.

So much has happened in our village since the Round-Up. How many widows in the span of ten years! Is there any account of the women who had metophorically or literally died of horrible rape?

Nowadays, round-ups are of different types. Not only would the enemy come. Along would come the traitorous groups, too. Along with the cruellest military wing of the security forces, named the Special Task Force, some extremist Muslim fanatics too, would besiege our village.

Then came the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). It was an earthquake surpassing the thunder.

Today, in our village, yesterday's relatives inform the militant groups known to them, of their present day's squabbles and incite internecine killings. Private scores are settled today with the might of the AK 47.

Women like us are desperate about our future, not knowing what it would be. My grandmother would hug me and cry. It pains me to hear her say in anguish, 'There is no elder brother to do good to you'. There are lots of sisters without their elder brothers, widows without their husbands.

Thousands of Tamils have escaped and gone to distant lands on the pretext of the Tamil problemin Sri Lanka. What can we say of the Batticaloa Tamils?

It is said that the much acclaimed Sinhalese King of ancient days, Dutugemunu, who killed the Tamil king Ellala, when he was a young Prince had lamented that he could not sleep when he was besieged on the one side by Tamils and on the other by the Indian ocean. Surrounded on all sides - with the Sinhalese on one side, the sea on the other, the Muslims on the north, the Thillai River on the south - where would my villagers of Batticaloa escape for their lives?

Small boys, who had just given up the habit of drinking their mothers' milk, have joined the armed struggle, vowing to fight for their mother tongue and motherland rather than die at the hands of the enemy. The lads and lasses of my village are dying in the seas and on the battle-ground for the freedom of Tamils of Eelam.

Enough are the sufferings we have gone through. We need peace. Even now I stare at the sandy mound on which my elder brother was buried and burnt

Those like us search for peace in our dreams of the future. Have we forgotten humanness? I heave a long sigh. Would anybody feel my pain? ●

Story based on actual events in 1985 in the eastern province of Sri Lanka (Translated with few amendments from the original in Tamil by Manohara Mylvaganam)

Readers Forum

Amir, Devolution and Nationalism

After reading the review of the biography of A Amirthalingam in the Tamil Times of Nov. '96, where the reviewer seemed to concur with the author's view that Amirtalingam was some kind of angel of peace and kindness, I was pleased to see that S. Narapalasingam (TT Dec. '96) has drawn attention to the speech by the late leader of the TULF at the Ramakrishna Mission Hall in 1977. I do, nevertheless, question the oversimplified view of SN that the youth were attracted to the LTTE because "violence was portrayed as exciting, admirable and heroic". The need for armed struggle was recognised as a result of the brutal oppression suffered by the people. Implicitly and explicitly violent caste oppression was successfully confronted only by violent means in the latter half of the 60's. At the time the TULF denounced in the name of non-violence the struggle of the oppressed castes for the right to be treated like ordinary human beings in public places and to enter places of public worship and took sides with the oppressors. The unsuccessful armed insurrection by the JVP in 1971 too was a sign of things to come. Thamil militancy in the seventies enjoyed the blessings of the Federal Party (later TULF), and let us not forget the response of the TULF and Amirtalingam to the killings of 'traitors' to the Thamil cause. It was only after the militants turned their guns against the TULF leadership that it expressed concern. Attraction to armed struggle was primarily a consequence of the failure of parliamentary manipulations and, if we still remember recent history, Indira Gandhi's government encouraged the militants in the not at all unrealistic hope that it could use them to serve India's regional ambitions. Indian agencies like the RAW pitted one movement against another and one leader against another in its efforts to achieve overall Indian control. The Indian authorities are to blame to a large extent for the internecine warfare of the 80's.

Devolution has been going through cycles of packaging, unpackaging and repackaging for so long that one gets the impression that, like God, it means different things to different people and some even question its existence. I should have been delighted to learn from DBS Jeyaraj in his article titled 'Chandrika, the moon on the wane' that President Kumaratunga still "hopes to implement an effective scheme of devolution". Somehow, I have become rather sceptical about the possibility of any real devolution with the current policy of 'peace through war'. DBSJ may be able to tell us, hopefully in a paper not belonging to the Divayina group, whether it is not already new moon in the Thamil political almanac.

TN Goplan's pieces in the TT rarely add much to the understanding of events in Thamilnaadu that one gathers from the establishment magazines like India Today (clearly on the right) and Frontline (supposedly on the left). One does not seriously expect the political parties of Thamilnaadu to contest elections with the national question of Sri Lanka as the central issue. Given the opportunist nature of all electoral politics, only the naïve would expect Karunaanidhi, the most seasoned political survivalist in Thamilnaadu, to take a principled stand. The popular magazines of the state are controlled by the elite, and, to their credit, they certainly have an eye on the till when they speak on some issues. I sense a slightly more sympathetic portrayal of the Thamil people's struggle in recent times, and am I correct to suspect a significant shift in the public mood?

The glee of TNG about the failure of Thamil nationalism in Thamilnaadu is understandable. But nationalism becomes the dominant issue only in the face of national oppression as, for example, in the case of Kashmir and Punjab. Some of the urgent social issues of today are taken up by the feminists, Dalit activists and environmentalists in Thamilnaadu. The militant and the not-so-militant left of Thamilnaadu has to take the initiative in these matters. If they fail, they may soon be doomed to the kind of fate that befell the parliamentary left in Sri Lanka.

S. Sivasegaram

47 Camberley Avenue
London SW20

Tamil Concern

Some of your readers may have been disturbed by a recent untrue and defamatory news item in the Sri Lankan Sunday Observer about Tamil Concern. This item refers to a postcard issued by Tamil Concern as "anti-Sri Lanka venom" and says that its issue "is seen as an attempt by the "Dirty Tricks" department of an LTTE front organisation to kill tourism to Sri Lanka". It does not say who, apart from the reporter, has "seen" this ludicrous and libellous interpretation.

The postcard in question states that 200,000 Tamil refugees have been displaced following bombing by the armed forces during 1995-96. These are facts which have been confirmed by the Red Cross and the Sri Lankan government. If stating these facts is sufficient to make us an LTTE front organisation, then by the logic of the Sunday Observer the Red Cross and Sri Lankan government are both LTTE front organisations!

The purpose of the postcard is not to kill tourism in Sri Lanka but to draw the attention of the world to the plight of the refugees, so that they will be inclined to make donations to the charitable organisations working there. Showing pictures of refugees for this purpose is not a political statement. Oxfam, for example, when it publishes photographs of Rwandan refugees is not acting as Hutu Militia front organisation, but simply encouraging donations. I should add that we are not using the postcard to raise funds for ourselves and it does not have out address or telephone number on it; people who see the postcard and wish to help the refugees can make donations to appropriate charities, not to us.

The primary purpose of Tamil Concern is to help refugees in the UK, by helping them to find jobs, providing employment training etc. We run various training courses (in computer literacy), job-seeking skills, etc) in association with the Refugee Council, local authorities and with the help of volunteers. Other schemes to provide work experience in areas such as accounting and computer hardware are underway. We are completely non-political. Our consultants who give up their time to train and advise are Sri Lankans who have been settled in England for many years and left Sri Lanka long before the present troubles. We wish to assure your readers that this shoddy piece of journalism, for which we trust that the Sunday Observer will soon be apologising, bears no relation to reality.

R Ganeshalingam

11 Copping Close,
Croydon, CR0 5JZ.

Tamil Leadership

After reading the lengthy Special Report No. 7 by the University Teachers for Human Rights, Jaffna, I am disappointed that the authors trot out a stale tune as their solution to the vexing problem in Sri Lanka. They conclude that "for the Tamil community to survive as a cultural and ethnic identity", a "new leadership will have to be helped to emerge..." (TT.Nov.'96). That's funny, I have heard this tune for the past 35 years since 1961, when the then (and current) Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandaranaike sent the army for the first time to Jaffna.

Long before the LTTE made its way into the lexicon of South Asian politics, the ruling Sinhalese establishment as well as a certain section of vociferous leftist intellectuals have made the same criticism on the leadership of S J V Chelvanayakam and A Amirthalingam, even though these two stalwarts never

(Continued on next page)

Book Review

Ideology and the Constitution: Essays on Constitutional Jurisprudence

By Radhika Coomaraswamy, (ICES, 1996, 178p. Hardcover Rs. 300.00, Paperback Rs. 200.00)

Review by Matthew Starnes,
Intern from McGill University Faculty of Law, Montreal, Canada.

In the traditional western understanding of state formation a constitution is meant to be stable, enduring and with occasional tinkering, provide a framework that allows society to develop and function peacefully and efficiently. The American and British constitutions are models of this ideal as, regardless of whether one actually agrees with the specific way either government system works, their enduring stability is undeniable. Even the endless attempts at reforming the Canadian constitution can be seen as based in the same ideology that if the constitution perfected all the problems created by the plural nature of Canadian society will resolve themselves. Judged from this perspective, Sri Lanka's constitutional history can hardly be qualified a success. With three constitutions since independence and a new one presently under consideration as a response to the continued ethnic strife, Sri Lanka has clearly not yet created a stable constitutional framework that allows for the unhindered development of a civil society.

Radhika Coomaraswamy's new book of essays *Ideology and the Constitution* examines Sri Lanka's troubled constitutional development from a fresh perspective. The standard western approach would follow a legalistic analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of specific articles K or constitutional proposals in the belief that the solution to the country's problems lay in drafting a perfect constitution. However, Ms. Coomaraswamy does not become bogged down in arcane, and often tedious, arguments for and against specific constitutional articles. Indeed, as the essays were written between 1987 and 1993, she does not directly deal with any specifics of the constitutional proposal now under consideration. Rather, she takes a step back, and examines how competing ideological basis, namely ethnic nationalism and political opportunism, have undermined the Anglo-American ideal of constitutional development in Sri Lanka.

Ms Coomaraswamy states plainly that she is a constitutionalist because, "none of the other ideologies prevalent in South Asia today are as committed to as specific and detailed a process of non-violent decision making as the ideology of constitutionalism." However, as her essays on constitutional development plainly show, the traditional Anglo-American paradigm of constitutionalism cannot be applied unquestioningly to developing societies. These societies lack some or all of the economic health and the civil and political maturity necessary to allow constitutionalism to work as it does in the United States or the United Kingdom. Ms. Coomaraswamy demonstrates how constitutional developments in developing societies are often usurped for partisan ends and how the normal western bulwark against such action, an independent judiciary, is often too weak, unaccustomed or ill-equipped to effectively prevent such usurpations. She also shows how South Asian societies often base their conception of legitimate political action on the demands of ethnic nationalism, rather than constitutionalism, and therefore the populace can be brought to acquiesce to such usurpations if they are seen to benefit the powerful ethnic group. These usurpations in turn result in the delegitimisation of constitutionalism and move society away from peaceful development.

This broader perspective, coupled with the fact that Ms. Coomaraswamy's essays are very well written, makes this book accessible not only to constitutional experts but to anyone concerned with the development of a civil society. Her analysis of the ideological basis of constitutional developments makes clear, in a way no analysis of specific constitutional mechanisms ever could, both what is actually going on in Sri Lanka's constitutional development and what one must strive for in order to bring about a civil society in anywhere in the world.

In addition to looking at constitutional development, three of the essays focus on the situation of human rights in Sri Lanka and South Asia. Again Ms. Coomaraswamy identifies how ideological underpinnings of western human rights models - a belief that human rights organizations are to act as watchdogs and adversaries to the state and seek redress through the court system - cannot be unquestioningly applied in a South Asian context where the courts have at times been ineffective and many of the worst human rights violations are conducted by non-state actors, such as the LTTE. In the chapter entitled to "Bellow like a Cow", she examines the situation of women's rights in South Asia in some detail. Using illustrative examples Ms. Coomaraswamy highlights that although there may be what by western standards would be an effective campaign to vindicate women's rights, such action does not always work in South Asia. Ensuring women's rights is not simply a matter of effective action by concerned groups along a western model but, as with all other rights and the creation of civil society in general, it is necessary to change societal perceptions.

Stable institutions that respect rights and allow the possibility of free and active participation by all members of society in the democratic process, and an independent, effective judiciary are necessary elements of a civil society. However, these institutions and conditions will not simply be created by incorporating them in a well drafted constitution. These can only emerge if a tradition of constitutional legitimacy, power sharing, mediation and conciliation exists to allow these institutions and conditions the chance to function and evolve. By identifying the ideological framework underpinning both actual and desired constitutional and human rights developments *Ideology and the Constitution* helps to highlight the path to be taken in evolving a civil society in the developing world. As such it is valuable contribution to the field that should be read and enjoyed by anyone interested in the development of a civil society. ●

(Continued from page 28)

touched a gun to speak for Tamil rights. Towards their ends, both the UNP and SLFP had presented "puppets" like Deveanayagams, Kumarasooriyars and Kadiggamars as the Tamil leaders and the Tamil population never even bothered to blink their eyes on these "puppets".

The authors of the Special Report No. 7 also has written about the ambivalence of Tamils in supporting the LTTE. I only wish that they should first recognise their ignorance on the history of freedom movements of this century before trying to hold the LTTE for a stricter code of morality under trying circumstances, than for example Mao's guerrillas or PLO rebels. Prabhakaran may not have a university degree, but he surely has heeded one of hinstein's maxims: "Organised power can be opposed only by organised power".

Sachi Sri Kantha

Shizuokka 437-01
Japan

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MATRIMONIAL

Tamil Christian parents *seek professional partner for independent affectionate daughter, 37, M.A., US citizen working in US. Reply to P.O.Box 90342, Oak Hill Station, TX 78709, USA.*

Parents *seek suitable groom, 32 to 40 years, for their daughter graduate teacher in employment, 31 years, born in London with traditional Tamil values. Religion immaterial. All correspondence will be treated confidentially. Please reply to M 910 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu brother, professional engineer and Canadian citizen, working in Canada, *seeks educated vegetarian groom for his slim, fair, strict vegetarian science graduate sister, 32 years, 5'3", teaching Physics and computers at Colombo. Please telephone 613 547 5940 (Canada).*

Jaffna Hindu *seeks UK partner for good looking sister, 28, good Colombo employment, Mars afflicted. Send horoscope, details. M 912 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek good looking bride, 20-26, accountant/professional in similar field for fair, tall smart son, 29, Australian citizen, M.Sc. in Computer Science. Send horoscope and photo (returnable). M 913 c/o Tamil Times.*

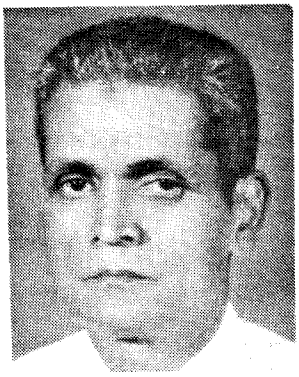
Jaffna Hindu family *seeks educated partner, well employed for daughter, 31, permanent resident, accounts supervisor. Send horoscope, details. M 914 c/o Tamil Times.*

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couple on their recent wedding.

Vaheeswaran *son of Mr. & Mrs. N. Vigneswaran of 'Rajasthan', 47 Pirappakulam Road, Vannarpannai, Jaffna and* **Biruntha** *daughter of Mr. & Mrs. N. Vigneswaralingam of 42 Kenwood Drive, Beckenham, Kent BR3 6QY on 19.1.97 at Wandsworth Civic Suite, Wandsworth High Street, London SW18 2PU.*

OBITUARIES



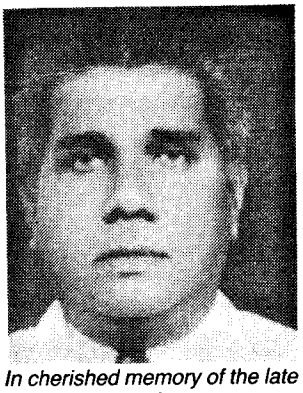
Mr. Karthigesu Balasingam, *Retired Station Master of Potpathy Road, Kokuvil East and later of 105 Palaly Road, Kantharmadam, Jaffna passed away peacefully in his sleep on 15th December 1996 in Scarborough, Canada. His daughter Vasuky and brother Mr. Kanagaratnam passed away earlier.*

He leaves behind his beloved wife Annapooranam; sons Nanthabalan and Yasothapalan; daughter Neeraja; daughters-in-law Jeevarani and Srilali; son-in-law Ravindran and grandchildren Claire, Tricia, Thayalan, Visakan, Thevyan and Vernija.

The members of the family wish to thank all relatives and friends who attended the funeral at Ogden Centre on Tuesday, the 17th December 1996, sent messages of sympathy and assisted them in many ways during the period of great sorrow. – Mrs. A. Balasingam, 5 Empringham Drive, Scarborough, Ontario M1B 3Y1. Tel: (416) 289 4696 (Canada) and 0171 286 5328 (UK).

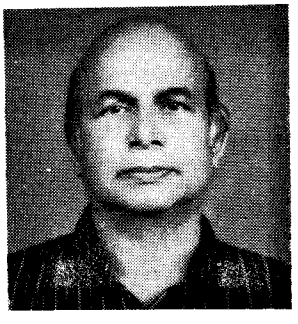
Dr. M. Sivanesan *of Dover House Surgery, 28 Bolton Road, Edmonton, London N18, formerly of Puloly, Point Pedro, born on 12.1.1939, passed away tragically of Meningococcal septicaemia on 28 October 1996. His funeral took place at the Golders Green Crematorium on 2 November 1996. He was the beloved husband of Satyabhama; father of Sharmila and Premila and son of the late Manonmani and Muttusamy (Teacher, Singapore). He was the youngest brother of the late Mahesan, Leela Velauthampillai (Brisbane), Kantha Sithamparapillai (Sydney), Sitha Balasingam, Ganesan (Perth), Karthigesan, Parvatha Vadivelu and Globaha Maha Kanapathypillai and a son-in-law of Annaluxmy and Mr. R. Paramakuru (Retired District Judge, Sri Lanka).*

IN MEMORIAM



In cherished memory of the late **Mr. Samuel Jeyanayagam Gunasegaram,** *formerly Director of Education, Sri Lanka, on the 33rd Death Anniversary (4.1.97).*

Greatly loved, deeply missed and always remembered by his beloved wife Mercy Rasamalar Gunasegaram (USA), loving daughter Vijeyadevi and son-in-law Prof. George Thambyahpillay (Nigeria), sons Mr. Wimalaraj Gunasegaram and Dr. Jeyandran Gunasegaram (USA) and grandchildren (USA and Australia) – Prof. & Mrs. G. Thambyahpillay, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria.



In loving memory of **Justice Tellippalai Wanam Rajaratnam,** *Retired Supreme Court Judge and Member of Parliament, Colombo on the Third Anniversary of his passing away on 15th January 1994.*

'Love and Remembrance
Last For Ever'.

Sadly missed and dearly loved by his family.

In loving memory of **Mrs. Sivagamasunthary Sitsapesan** *on the second anniversary of her passing away on 19th January 1995.*

Sad are our hearts
That loved you,
Silent our tears that fall
But living our lives without you
Is the hardest part of all.

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by her loving husband Sitsapesan, son Manoharan, daughter Savithiri, daughter-in-law Rebecca, son-in-law Varathan and Grandchildren Holly, Daniel and Luxhmi. – 6 Cambria Lodge, 2c Oakhill Road, London SW15 2QU.

In fond memory of **Mrs. Ganeswary Tharmalingam** *of Kondavil East on the fourth anniversary of her passing away on 21.1.93.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her loving husband Tharmalingam; children Brabalini, Bremjit and Ranjit; son-in-law Dr. W.N. Linganandhan; daughters-in-law Dr. Vani Bremjit and Shamini Ranjit; grandchildren Abirami, Sathya, Praneela, Praseetha, Prashoban, Praveen and Anjana. – 32 Anvil Way, North Springfield, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 5SZ. Tel: 01245 466363.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

February 1 *6.30pm Paul Robeson Theatre presents Tamil Performing Arts Society's Tamil Drama Festival 97(1) – Four Plays – directed by K. Balendra at their Theatre in the Treaty Centre, High Street, Hounslow TW3 1ES. Tel: 0181 459 4335/ 470 7883 or Box Office 0181 577 6969.*

Feb. 2 *Presentation of Lord Jesus Christ. 2.00pm. Debate in Tamil: The Dowry – Is it out of date? at 55 Bondway, Vauxhall, London SW8 1SJ. Tel: 0171 582 4635.*

Feb. 3 *Krishna Ekathasi.*

Feb. 5 *Pirathosam.*

Feb. 7 *Amavasai.*

Feb. 9 *6.00pm Tamil Orphans Trust presents Music Vocal concert by P. Unnikrishnan accompanied by V. Ramamoorthy – Violin, S. Ranganathan – Miruthangam, and A. Shankar – Gaddam (all from Tamil Nadu) at Brent Town Hall, Forty Lane, Wembley, Middx. Tel: 0181 908 3540/482 7745/422 3943.*

Feb. 10 *Chathurthi.*

Feb. 11 *Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.*

Feb. 12 *Ash Wednesday; Sashdi.*

Feb. 14 *Feast of St. Valentine; Karthigai.*

Feb. 16 *First Sunday of Lent.*

Feb. 17 *Ekathasi.*

Feb. 19 *Pirathosam.*

Feb. 21 *Full Moon.*

Feb. 22 *Masi Maham.*

Feb. 23 *Second Sunday of Lent.*

Feb. 27 *Feast of St. Gabriel.*

At Bhawan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 0171 381 3086/ 4608.

Feb. 5 *6.30pm India Republic Day Celebrations. Speeches, Music, Dance & Snacks. All Welcome.*

Feb. 15 *7.00pm Flute Recital by Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia.*

Feb. 21 *7.30pm Uttar-Dakshin Concert. Rhymes, Raga and Bells.*

LONDON TAMIL CENTRE

Due to the continued growth of the Centre, we require additional staff to compliement our existing team of experienced and talented staff.

Vacancies exist in the following areas:

1. Tamil Language
2. Carnatic Vocal
3. Mirthangam
4. Carnatic Flute

We also require a part-time administrator for the Day Centre for the Elderly to work during evenings and at week-ends.

For details of job description and remuneration, please write to:

The Secretary,
London Tamil Centre,
253 East Lane,
Wembley, HAO 3NN

Tel/Fax 0181 908 2646

Closing date for applications: ***21st February 1997***

AUSTRALIAN NEWSLETTER

Saraswathy Pooja: *The Natanalaya School of Dance presented an evening of Dance and Music to celebrate Saraswathy Pooja on 19.10.96 at Burwood Girls' School Hall. The proceedings commenced with the pooja and was followed by a veena recital and items of dance. Each and every student including the beginners contributed dance items. Classical items were intermixed with folk dances and mini dance dramas. The last dance depicting Shakti in the form of Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswathy was well received by the appreciative audience.*

The Guests of Honour were Mrs. Elizabeth Gewandt, Deputy Mayor, Strathfield Council; Mr. Andrew Ho, Municipal Councillor and Mrs. Lea McCarthy. They spoke appreciating the achievements of the students and their Artistic Director Smt Jeyaluxmy Kandiah. They also confirmed the council's commitment to the policy of multiculturalism and serving the needs of the immigrant community in the area.

Vasantha Malai 1996 *(A Spring Night of Cultural Activities) was presented by the Sydney Resource Centre at the Burwood School Hall on 2.11.96. The Chief Guest was the Hon. Paul Zammit M.P. and the Guest of Honour was Dr. B. Balakrishnan. The first item was a mini-dance drama titled 'Krishna Leela' which was followed by a Thillana dance both performed by the students of the Natanalaya Dance School. Mr. Zammit in his speech praised the Tamils in his electorate for being active in maintaining their cultural identity and religious beliefs. He confirmed the Federal Government's commitment to multiculturalism and the elimination of racial discrimination.*

His speech was followed by a vocal recital by the students of Mrs. Kala Chandramohan. This was followed by an event which was unique for Sydney. Mr. M.S. Selvarajah organised and presided over a debate in Tamil rhyming verses on 'Haven't the toiling Tamil youth achieved enough?' The participants were Messrs Baskaran, Moorthy, Chandrahasan and Nesarajah and the debate was highly appreciated by the capacity audience.

The final item was a drama titled 'Apasuram' produced by the Sydney Tamil Theatre Group. It was 'Theatre of the Absurd' and its humour was greatly appreciated by the audience and the actors were Messrs Karunanithy, Yogarajah, Sriskantharajah, Srignanaguru, Selvarajah and Prabhakaran.

The Sydney Resource Centre runs a Tamil Library and is very active in helping Tamil writers to publish and launch their works.

National Heroes' Day 1996 *was organised by The Tamil Coordinating Committee of Australia (Sydney Branch) on 30.11.96 at the Ukrainian Youth Centre in Liolcombe, Sydney. Proceedings commenced with the raising of the 'Puli Kodi' and observation of two minutes silence in memory of those who had died for the Tamil cause. Then came the lighting of oil lamps and the offering of flowers to the temporary memorial erected in the hall.*

The highlights of the day were the speech by Mr. T. Jeyakumar, L.T.T.E. representative in Australia and New Zealand, a drama entitled 'Living Sculptures' by the Tamil Cultural Society, a recitation of poetry in praise of the fallen heroes, a speech by Professor Margaret Tarwick of New Zealand, the drama 'Sandalwood Forests' performed by the Melbourne Tamil Cultural society. Both dramas were of high standard and were highly appreciated by the audience. Prof. Margaret Tarwick, a New Zealander, who's mother tongue is English, has for some time shown great interest in the Tamil struggle and even visited Jaffna, spoke in perfect Tamil.

National Heroes Day is celebrated every year by the Tamils of Sydney and this year's celebrations drew a huge crowd. A booklet was published to commemorate the day. Each page was sponsored by various organisations and individuals of New South Wales.

Religious Activities in Sydney: *The Hindu month of Margazhi, which begins on 16.12.96 is a busy month for Hindus in Sydney. Sri Venkateswara Temple opens at 6.00am and Thiruppavou is sung by the priests at the shrine of Venkateswara, while Thiruvempavai is sung at the shrine of Lord Shiva. The Thiruvempavai festival at the Sri Murugan Temple was also celebrated and devotees assembled at 5.00am.*

The annual midnight pooja of Sri Venkateswara was performed on 31st December to invoke the blessings of the Lord for 1997.

Food Fair to raise money for Tamil refugees in Sri Lanka *was organised by The Tamils' Coordinating Committee on 4.1.97 at the Homebush Primary School Premises. Food items such as Idli, Thosai, Kothu Roti, Uthappam, Hoppers, Pittu etc were sold. It was a resounding success with all the food items sold by early afternoon.*

CANADIAN NEWSLETTER

Toronto an amalgamated Mega City from January 1988: *Elections for the new Municipality of Toronto are scheduled for November 1997, under proposed new legislation now before the provincial parliament of Ontario. The existing municipalities of Scarborough, York, North York, East York, Etibicoke, City of Toronto, Metro Toronto will be abolished and a Mega City constituted. The new municipality of Toronto will have a resident population of 2.2 million.*

Toronto has an ethnic vote estimated at 40% and is expected to grow over 60% at the turn of the century. It is expected that a Cheung would be the mayor and Kandiahs and Chellammahs would be city councillors. 80% of the Sri Lankans in Canada are in Toronto and number over 150,000.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation *under the directorship of Illaya Barathy (Kandiah Sivasothy) is having a pronounced effect on the expatriate Tamil community. Its 24 hour broadcast of music, news, views especially the telephone interviews is welcomed by the house bound elderly and those hungry for hot home news. Its impact on the Tamil print media is so great that a few newspapers have closed down and the healthier ones forced to reduce circulation.*

Kayts, St. Anthony's College Building Fund: *The College Old Students' Association had their Annual Christmas Dinner Dance on 14.12.96 and collected over $2500 towards the fund to revitalise their Alma Mater. It should be recalled that in November 1996 when the Bishop of Jaffna, Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Savundranayagam visited Toronto, the O.S.A. donated $3000 and he promised every effort to get the college restarted on the old premises partly bombed out. At present a skeleton college is functioning at Little Flower Convent, Karampon and dispersed students are tardily returning.*

Senior Tamils' Bridge Club, Toronto *had its annual Award Ceremony in conjunction with the Seniors' Christmas Party. Rev. Dr. S. Jebanesan, C.S.I. Bishop of Jaffna and former Principal of Jaffna College was the Guest Speaker and the ceremony was presided over by Ms. Alex Sharma, Coordinator, Oriole Community Resource Centre, who gave away the trophies to the following.* **Duplicate Bridge:** *(Winners) R. Pathinathan & S.M. Kulendran Tie with N. Jesuvant & S. Arumugathasan, (Runners-up) A. Arulanantham & N.P. Singha.* **Presidents Trophy:** *(Winner) Siva S. Nathan (Runner-up) V. Thangavelautham.* **Gnanaratnam Trophy:** *(Winner) Nada Thambu, (Runners-up) T. Arasaratnam & Sham Remulla.* **Team of Four for Bridge Club Trophy:** *(Winners) S. Sathianathan, T. Sivarajan, J.C. Kumaradas & R. Pathinathan (Runners-up) Aloy Ratnasingham, A.R. Alexander, S. Shanmuganathan & K.T. Ponnambalam.*

Captain Chandran Awarded M.B.E.

Captain Kandiah Chandran was awarded the MBE in the recent New Year's Honours List, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the development of social housing through the Presentation Housing Association (PHA), of which he has been the Chief Executive for the last eight years. During this period, Capt. Chandran built the PHA from an organisation saddled with a deficit of £200,000 to one which is now acknowledged to be the foremost black-led housing association in the country, managing over 2000 homes and assets worth over £100 million.

Capt. Chandran's honour comes at a time when he takes retirement from PHA to head the Presentation Education and Employment Charitable Trust. The Trust which aims to raise £1 million in the first year will commit itself to investing in the education and training needs of inner city 'black youth' who it believes have been neglected by the mainstream policy makers and institutions.

Vythilingam Suntheralingam Deputy Director of Education (Science) – Jaffna – An Appreciation

'SUNTHA' to the large circle of friends is an alumnus of Jaffna Hindu College. After his biological science degree from the University of Ceylon he was a successful teacher of biological sciences in the Advanced Level classes both in Jaffna and in Batticaloa. As a Science Circuit Education Officer he was held in high esteem by educationalists of all levels for his practical approach to propagate science specially in rural schools. He was actively involved in the working of the UNESCO aided Thondamannaru Hydro-Biological centre which did yeoman service for the research and popularisation of science for many decades in Sri Lanka. His dedicated educational service saw him elevated to the position of Principal, Manipay Hindu College which he held with great acceptance and that too at a time of turmoil. His labours to maintain the balance in the school sapped up all the resources at his command.

He had a stint of four years service as a science teacher at the National Youth Service in Seychelles. His approach to practical science to students was the envy of many and he was ranked high by the school community and the educational administrators. His numerous science projects threw new light on the eco-system of this beautiful island and are still considered valuable assets in the field of science. His attachment to his family was so high that he decided to get back to the educational service in Sri Lanka and was posted to Jaffna. As a usual annual event to go to Colombo for the A/L Zoology paper marking at Royal College he made this trip this September not knowing that cruel destiny had decided otherwise. He would never have imagined that he was bidding farewell to his loved ones when he left his home at Annaicodai.

It is unfortunate that his collapse at the marking centre hostel on the 6th of October proved fatal. The wide circle of friends at home and abroad have lost a sincere friend, a convincing conversationalist on men and matters, a fine mixer with the high and low and above all a humane personality. We all share the grief with his dear ones at home.

V. Sivasupramaniam,

Seychelles.

Hartley College Past Pupils Meet

Past Pupils of Hartley College, Point Pedro in UK held their Annual General Meeting and Dinner on 11th November 1996 at Queen's Hotel, 122 Church Street, London SE19 2UG.

At the AGM, the following office-bearers were elected. **President:** *V. Santhalingam;* **Vice-President:** *A. Easwaramohan;* **Secretary:** *G.D. Kulasingam; Treasurer: T. Rajkumar;* **Sports Secretary:** *T. Arulnanthy;* **Committee Members:** *A. Paramakuru, Dr. K. Mylvaganam, G.R. Selvarajan and T.S. Murare.*

The Dinner was attended by over 150 membes, their spouses, friends and children.

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Merton Young Poets Competition 1996

Aarani Ganeslingam

Over 300 children of different cultures and groups in the London Borough of Merton participated in the English poetry competition which was supported by the Merton Council. The children in three age groups (a) under 8 (b) over 8/under 12 and (c) over 12/under 16 were judged by a panel consisting of Richard King, Head Teacher, Park House Middle School, Wimbledon; Malcolm Parker, Chairman, Merton Arts Council and Patric Cunnane, Poet and Councillor.

The function to distribute awards was held on 7.12.96 presided over by the Deputy Mayor, Councillor John Cole. The award winners were Aarani Ganesalingam (Under 8), Lilliam Low (Over 8/under 12) and Patrick Farrelly (Over 12/under 16).

Councillor Poet Patric Cunnane speaking at the function complimented Mr. T. Srikantharajah for havingh been a pioneer in organising this competition and function in the Merton Borough and said: 'Poetry wrestles us away from the TV and Video and puts us in touch with our feelings in the most direct way. The children who entered the first Merton Young Poets' Competition succeeded in obeying this simple law of poetry'.

All poems that were entered for the competition have been published as 'Poetry Anthology' – **Hear My Voice**, available at Merton Young Poets, 52 Kingsley Road, Wimbledon, London SW19 8HF. Tel: 0181 543 2126.

Mr. M. Peri Sundaram – An Appreciation

M. Peri Sundaram the well-known solicitor and eminent trade unionist passed away in London on 13 December 1996. Mr. Sundaram who was born and educated in Sri Lanka, having qualified as a lawyer, joined the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) in the late 1950s and was its Administrative Secretary and later became Deputy General Secretary. He played a leading role in the affairs of the CWC and before his departure to the UK for family reasons in 1971 was among those instrumental in strengthening the infrastructure and activities of the CWC during its formative stages following the breakaway by the faction led by Mr. Aziz.

Mr. Sundaram qualified as a solicitor and worked with some of UK's leading law firms. He was with Charles Russell for over 20 years having previously worked for Farrer & Co., solicitors to Her Majesty the Queen. During this period he continued his close links with the CWC in his capacity as International Affairs Secretary. His father the late Senator Peri Sunaram was a founder member of the Ceylon Indian Congress, later named Ceylon Workers Congress, and its first President. Senator Peri Sundaram was the first Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce in the State Council of Ceylon and became Deputy President of the Senate in 1947.

Even after leaving Sri Lanka Mr. Sundaram continued to champion the cause of the labour movement in the island, in particular that of the plantation workers, by representing them in the international labour arena. His steadfast commitment and deep involvement in the international labour movement was duly recognised by his election to the Executive Body of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the largest and the most representative trade union organisation in the world. The ICFTU represents over 130 million workers in over 101 countries. Mr. Sundaram was also the Vice President for the Asian Region of the ICFTU and served in these positions for 16 years. Mr. Sundaram was closely involved in the activities of the International Labour Organisation, an organ of the United Nations. In June 1996 he was elected to the Governing Body of the ILO. Mr Sundaram was the only Sri Lankan to be twice elected as the Worker Representative to the ILO Governing Body where he served with great distinction until his demise.

Throughout his career as a trade unionist, Mr. Sundaram showed genuine concern for the plight of the ordinary workers and associated himself with the numerous socio-economic issues concerning the Third World. His deep concern for such issues as the economic emancipation of the working class, equality for female workers, child labour and the improvement of the social and living conditions of workers in general was well known and won him the highest respect and admiration from trade unionists the world over.

Although he lived in the UK for many years, Mr. Sundaram never forgot his roots. He was always concerned about the Sri Lankan Plantation community. He set up a fund for the education of Plantation children and encouraged others to join his endeavours. He was also deeply worried about the continuing war and in later years involved himself behind the scenes in efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution to the Sri Lankan national conflict.

Both in public and private life he set the highest standards for himself. His conduct throughout life was based on a set of values – integrity, honesty, truth and loyalty. In this regard he was a role model not only to his family but also to his colleagues and members of the international labour fraternity. His gentle and humble demeanour matched by his unique ability to establish a rapport with others won him numerous friends. His grit, determination and capacity for hard work coupled with a fine sense of humour were truly remarkable attributes he possessed and which undoubtedly contributed to his success and eminence as a lawyer and international trade unionist. He will be missed by all, particularly his wife and two sons whom he loved dearly.

Mayan Vije,
Hounslow, Middlesex.

Janani's Bharatha Natya Arangetram

Janani, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nagarajah of Southall, Middx and disciple of Smt Rajini Shureshkumar had her arangetram on 19.10.96 at the Logan Hall, London WC1. Janani appeared on the stage for the first part of the dance recital invoking Lord Ganesha with piety and devotion. She continued with jathiswaram and Varnam. Her repertoire gained momentum and in Narayana Kavutham and Andal Dance transported the audience to a dreamworld in which she took us slowly like the Pied Piper into the world of the unknown of spirituality and ecstasy. The lyric 'Ulakam Puhalum' brought us back to earth again.

This piece defined and described the nature of Bharatha Natya and how it is learnt under a devoted Guru like Smt Rajini. When Janani performed the 'Kalinga Nadanam', she became the snake itself, danced with agility and transformed herself to none other than Lord Krishna, who subdued the snake. The story was well interpreted with flexible hand and feet movements. The untiring efforts were crowned with success when the vigorous Thillana was performed.

Janani captivated the audience not only with the rhythmic movements of hands and eyes but also with her grace, poise and clarity of style. She was ably accompanied by her Guru Smt Rajini Shureshkumar on Nattuvangam, Smt Ambika Thamotheram and Sri Somasundra Desikar – Vocal, Sri Muthu Sivarajah – Mirudangam, Sri L. Kothandapani – Violin, Sri P. Gnanavarathan – Flute and Sri K. Chidamparanathan – Morsing. Sri Nada Mohan and Smt Punitha Perinparajah were the comperes.

V. Shan.

From Kattubedde to Hounslow

In the year 1973, some undergraduate Tamil students of Kattubedde University of Sri Lanka, experimented with Tamil drama production after the manner handled by the new theatre in Bengal. Their staging at various centres in the Island received enormous support but they had to leave the homeland due to the now known ethnic war. Since their arrival in Britain some eleven years ago, the troupe consisting of actors, musicians, dancers and theatre technicians, under the great thespian Balendra, has been staging before expatriate Tamil audiences in Britain, France, Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and even distant Australia and Canada, winning plaudits everywhere.

Now this unique Group of Tamil Performing Arts Society has earned the greatest honour of being invited by the prestigious Western Paul Robeson Theatre Group to stage under their auspices four Tamil dramas at their Hounslow Theatre on 1st February 1997. It is an honour distinctly earned by the Tamil Performing Arts Society, through their united, friendly and honest dedication to the art. We understand that they have in hand about forty productions, including some for children, ready for staging at short notice. Their latest achievement in being invited by a Western Drama troupe under their own auspices lends a unique honour which they fully deserve.

Sivapatha Sundaram.

Navalar Vizha in London

The celebration to remember Arumuga Navalar of Yalpanam saw its eleventh annual event on 15.12.96 at the East Ham Sri Murugan Temple Hall in London. The determined efforts of Mrs. Thangaratnam Muttucumaraswamy and her supporters flowered into a well presented function with speeches, dances and music recitals. The keenness with which children made speeches, danced and sang devotional songs touched everyone present. They were enthusiastic and showed some curiosity to know about the life of Navalar who brought back to life in print most of the treasured works in Tamil and laid the foundation for Tamil education as far back as the middle of the 19th century.

Mrs. Muttucumaraswamy presided and the introductory speech was made by Mr. V.R. Ramanathan of the Saiva Munnetra Sangam (U.K. Branch). Mr. M. Puveendran from the City University Tamil Manram spoke on the life and achievements of Navalar. Mrs. Varatha Shanmuganathan spoke on 'Navalar and Bharathiyar' and said that Navalar was a forerunner who put into practice what Bharathiyar envisaged in his songs. Navalar established Tamil schools to spread education and knowledge to every nook and corner of Yalpanam and some parts of South India. Saiva Munnetra Sangam pupils sang devotional songs and dance items were contributed by the pupils of Smt. Rajini Shureshkumar. The final item was 'Isaiyamutham' by Mr. P. Gnanavarathan. He sang in praise of Navalar and played the flute and was accompanied by Mr. Kothandapani on Violin and Mr. Sithamparanathan on Mirudangam.

Threeya Tharmendiran's Arangetram

Threeya Tharmendiran's Bharata Natya Arangetram at Logan Hall on 14th December proved itself a very clean show. This reviewer had the opportunity to watch the Nattuvangam of Threeya's Guru, Lakshmi Samarakoon for the first time and it must be said that her timings, delivery and Theermanams were clean and attractive. Some of the phrases in the Varnam were long and taxing, but she went through with command and confidence. Young Threeya took them in her stride with equal nonchalance. Pieces for the repertoire were chosen with necessary balance. A notable feature was Threeya dancing for half the items, including the star Varnam, in the same costume; a bold venture indeed. Incidentally, the placement of a Patham before Varnam stole some of Varnam's characteristic norms.

In most of the items in the repertoire credit is given to Sri Karaikudi Krishnamurthy, the mrudangam accompanist for composing music and choreography. It is very generous and characteristic on his part, whenever he is engaged as accompanist at Arangetrams, he always helps with new ideas and features, out of his association with Madras Kalakshetra.

Threeya, we are told, is just thirteen, and has undergone six years of training in Bharata natyam. She has proved that she is talented, has attractive figure, enough grit and determination to go high. Parents Tharmendiran and Yamuna who have inherited the cultural ideals of grandfather Vaitialingam, writer, scholar, lover of arts, friend and philosopher, have their own part to play.

Sivapatha Sundaram.

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